



THE GRAVES ARE NOT SILENT:  
A CASE STUDY OF REPENTANCE, RACIAL RECONCILIATION, AND  
SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

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## DEDICATION

To the congregation of

Asbury United Methodist Church  
Smyrna, Delaware

and to

the Reverend Rudolph White, Jr.

and the congregation of

Centennial United Methodist Church  
Smyrna, Delaware

***“Differences don’t have to make a difference.”***

## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	vii
CHAPTER ONE	
THE CASE AT HAND .....	1
Introduction	1
Asbury United Methodist Church, Smyrna, Delaware and Its African-American Cemetery	2
Smyrna Race Relations and Racial Attitudes 1776-2005	12
A Struggle of Competing Myths	27
Next Steps	30
CHAPTER TWO	
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS: TOWARD A NEW REALITY .....	32
Introduction	32
God Loves To Revive	33
Racial Reconciliation Part and Parcel of the New Life God Rekindles	35
Repentance as Necessary Precursor	56
Conclusion and Next Steps	66
CHAPTER THREE	
HISTORICAL INSIGHTS: CLEANING OFF A GEM .....	68
Introduction	68
John Wesley's Holiness-Driven Spirituality and Theology	69
Methodist Cultural Accommodation in Matters of Race	81
Conclusion	93

CHAPTER FOUR	
CHOOSING A STRATEGY: STEPS TO A PARTNERSHIP .....	94
Introduction	94
Practical Resources, Tools, Studies, Concepts, Practices	95
The Need for Intentionality	102
Three Congregational Models	107
Conclusion	133
CHAPTER FIVE	
THEOLOGY MADE TANGIBLE .....	135
<i>The Steps Toward Wholeness: Learning and Repentance</i> Study Group	135
Strategic Partnership Beginnings	144
Pending Matters	147
Final Recommendations	150
Conclusion	151
APPENDIX 1:	
A TIMELINE FROM GRAVESITE REDISCOVERY TO PRESENT .....	153
APPENDIX 2:	
WORDING OF CODICIL ATTACHED TO	
ASBURY'S 1976 DEED OF SALE TO THE AMERICAN LEGION .....	156
APPENDIX 3:	
RESOLUTION UNANIMOUSLY PASSED	
AT SPECIAL CHARGE CONFERENCE	
OF ASBURY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, AUGUST 5, 2005 .....	157
APPENDIX 4:	
"LEARNINGS AND HOPES" RECORDED BY <i>STEPS TOWARD WHOLENESS</i>	
STUDY PARTICIPANTS, MAY 25, 2006 .....	158
APPENDIX 5:	
RECOMMENDATIONS FROM <i>STEPS TOWARD WHOLENESS</i>	
STUDY GROUP TO ASBURY AND CENTENNIAL CHURCH COUNCILS .....	159

APPENDIX 6: A PORTION OF THE MINUTES OF THE CHURCH COUNCIL MEETING OF ASBURY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, JUNE 19, 2006 RELATING TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE <i>STEPS TOWARD WHOLENESS</i> STUDY GROUP .....	160
APPENDIX 7: REPORTS TO THE CHARGE CONFERENCE OF CENTENNIAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, OCTOBER 18, 2006, INDICATING ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CENTENNIAL-ASBURY STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP .....	161
APPENDIX 8: “FRUIT SALAD” A SERMON PREACHED AT ASBURY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SEPTEMBER 17, 2006 .....	163
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	169
VITA .....	176

## ABSTRACT

In the case of the recent rediscovery of historic, unmarked African-American gravesites on land formerly owned by the congregation of Asbury United Methodist Church, Smyrna, Delaware, a necessary response arising from a biblically supported, historically informed, practical theology of spiritual renewal through repentance and racial reconciliation has been faithfully undertaken.

After describing the case at hand, a practical theology of spiritual renewal through repentance and racial reconciliation will be shown to be biblically supported and applicable to the case, including the assumptions that racial reconciliation is an expected concomitant of spiritual revival, and that personal and communal repentance is a precondition to experiencing these realities. An examination of Wesleyan and Methodist history will demonstrate that insights regarding the necessity of synthesizing individual and social holiness are particularly applicable to the case at hand. It then will be shown that a strategy of utilizing the study resource *Steps Toward Wholeness: Learning and Repentance*, and seeking to enter into a long-term, strategic partnership with local African-American congregations, is a practical response consistent with the theology.<sup>1</sup> Finally, it will be argued that in carrying out this strategy, members of the Asbury and Centennial United Methodist congregations actually experienced the expected spiritual renewal through repentance and reconciliation in preliminary yet authentic ways.

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<sup>1</sup> General Commission on Christian Unity and Religious Concerns of the United Methodist Church, *Steps Toward Wholeness: Learning and Repentance* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 2000).



## CHAPTER ONE THE CASE AT HAND

*Son of man, can these bones live?*  
--Ezekiel 37:3

### **Introduction**

Late on a summer Sunday evening, following a busy day of worship services in the morning and a welcome home celebration for youth returning from a mission trip in the afternoon, a pastor finally sits down to read that morning's newspaper. In perusing an article in the local section entitled, "Sale of Graveyard a 'Disturbing' Mystery," he is startled to read the article's lead sentence, "The town of Smyrna is trying to determine the circumstances under which Asbury United Methodist Church, one of the town's oldest churches, sold land hosting a black cemetery to an American Legion post."<sup>1</sup> Though vaguely aware of the recent discovery of unmarked graves during construction of a parking lot by the local American Legion, he had no inkling that his church, the congregation he had been serving as pastor for just over a year at the time, had any connection to this discovery.

Research of the church's own documents indicated that indeed, nearly thirty years previously, Asbury Church had sold this 0.6 acre lot to the American Legion as presumably construction-appropriate land, with full knowledge of its history as an African American cemetery. In the church's own site plan, the very plot of land sold is

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<sup>1</sup> James Merriweather, "Sale of Graveyard a 'Disturbing' Mystery: Fifteen Graves, Black Cemetery Unearthed During Smyrna Parking Lot Expansion," *The News Journal*, 17 July 2005, B1.

identified as a “Colored Cemetery.” In a codicil attached to the deed of sale, the church’s Trustees acknowledged that though they had received permission from the State of Delaware in 1976 to “remove monuments and possible gravesites (circa 1850) ... to a more appropriate location,” the Trustees indicated in the document that “no particular grave could be identified,” and instead acknowledged only the “proper removal of grave monuments.” The final sentence of the attached document indicated, “In the event during any construction on this site a grave should be discovered it will be the responsibility of Asbury United Methodist Church to see that proper relocation of grave is accomplished.”

The discovery of this decision from its recent past raised several questions for this congregation and its pastor. What follows in this thesis project is a reflection upon the empirical unknowns and opportunities inherent in these questions:

- How might this predominantly white congregation respond to its own apparent past racial injustice and insensitivity in a God-honoring manner?
- From what biblical, theological, historical, and practical ministry resources might they draw in order to make the most of the situation moving forward?
- What opportunities for experiencing repentance, spiritual renewal, and genuine Christian transformation were latent in this discovery?

By giving attention to these questions, a practical theology of spiritual renewal through repentance and racial reconciliation will emerge, and an actual congregation’s engagement with such a theology will be described.

### **Asbury United Methodist Church, Smyrna, Delaware and Its African-American Cemetery**

In 1976, after having its fair market value appraised at \$7,500 as residentially zoned, presumably construction appropriate land, the Trustees of Asbury Church, knowing it

hosted an historic, unmarked African American cemetery, sold this lot for \$6,500 to the local American Legion post. In what historical and social context was this apparently unjust and racially insensitive decision made?

Asbury Church, Smyrna (as with the other thirteen congregations bearing the same name within the bounds of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference of the United Methodist Church), associates its beginnings as a Methodist congregation with the ministry of Bishop Francis Asbury in the late 1700s. In 1780 Asbury preached at Duck Creek Cross Roads (Smyrna area), interestingly enough for this study, upon the text, Matthew 3:7-10 “Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance.”<sup>2</sup> Beginning from at least 1778, the Methodist society at Duck Creek Crossroads continuously received itinerant Methodist preachers under Asbury’s appointment, and soon after the formal founding of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784, land was given to the congregation in the town of Smyrna for the erection of a meeting house. In 1786 a frame building large enough to hold an assembly of three hundred people was erected near the site of the present unmarked cemetery at North and Delaware Streets.

By 1838 the growing congregation began considering a new church building to replace its frame meeting house. In 1845 a new brick structure was built just two blocks to the south-east on Mt. Vernon Street. The present congregation continues to use this building as its sanctuary. Methodist Conference statistics for 1846 indicated the local church membership comprised “220 whites, 66 coloreds.”<sup>3</sup> While the congregation obviously could have been considered multi-racial in some sense at this point in its history, the move from North and Delaware streets to Mt. Vernon Street marked a turning

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<sup>2</sup> George Caley, *A History of Asbury United Methodist Church, Smyrna, Delaware: Founded 1778* (Shane Quality Press, 1972), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Caley, 35.

point in the congregation's relationship with its African-American members. Following this physical move, and reflecting broader social movements within Methodism as a whole,<sup>4</sup> two distinct, predominantly African American Methodist congregations began to emerge in the Smyrna area during the middle decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Both congregations, Bethel AME Church (founded 1849), and Centennial Methodist Episcopal (now United Methodist) Church (formally founded 1876), acknowledge that a portion of their beginnings can be traced to, though certainly not limited to, Asbury Church's multi-racial period from 1830 or earlier, through 1858.

According to a written history prepared by Centennial's members, "In 1830, the Negroes attended services at old Asbury with the Whites. At times, they were permitted to hold services of their own with the benefit of an exhorter chosen from among themselves. In 1834 these worshippers were placed on a Negro Circuit."<sup>5</sup> This indicates that even before the 1845 move to Mt. Vernon Street the African American portion of the Asbury congregation was becoming distinct and forming its own identity. This movement toward separation most likely reflected a dual motivation enumerated by Henry Mitchell, namely, a negative desire not to be treated as second-class citizens (at best) by their white brethren, but also a positive mission-oriented motivation to provide culturally relevant spiritual and social ministries.

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<sup>4</sup> See Carolyn Menninger Oehler, *Steps Toward Wholeness, Learning and Repentance: A Study Guide for United Methodist Congregations in preparation for an Act of Repentance for Racism and Pan-Methodist Conversations on Union* (The United Methodist Church: The General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, and the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church, 2000), [cited 10 Jan. 2007]. Online: <http://www.gccuic.org/>. As will be shown in chapter three, the experiences of African American Methodists in Smyrna in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are a quintessential example of the African American Methodist experience more generally, poignantly reflecting the larger themes traced in this study.

<sup>5</sup> *Commemorative Booklet: Delaware Annual Conference 1864-1965: "First To Organize, First To Merge"* (Dover, Delaware: The United Methodist Church, Peninsula Annual Conference Commission on Archives and History, Delaware Conference History Committee, 1990), appendix, 5.

The issue of sponsorship looms so large because whites saw their paternalism, at worst, as greatly needed, while the African American churches came into being as outright protests against cruel abuse and gross discrimination (such as the poorest seats, and receipt of the sacraments only after whites). The treatment accorded Richard Allen and Absalom Jones in the balcony of St. George's Methodist Church may not have been typical in its threat of violence, but this basic attitude towards African Americans was common. . . . However, it would be a mistake to think of the African American churches as bodies of protest only. There was also a clear sense of need for spiritual and social ministries, to African American communities and families. . . . Their church starting role was far more than protesting against poor and segregated seating, plus communion only after the white folks had been served; it was even more than the crusade for liberation and against slavery.<sup>6</sup>

The assumption one might draw from Mitchell's emphasis on the cultural relevance motivation is that even if there had not been any racial injustice, indignity or oppression expressed by the white majority in any way, African American Christians still would have been strongly motivated to find creative ways to express their faith and provide social ministries in uniquely African cultural ways. Though both these motivations for separation were likely present, that is, a negative desire to avoid oppression, and a positive desire for culturally relevant spiritual expression, it is difficult to gauge in retrospect, the relative strength of these motivations for 19<sup>th</sup> century African American Methodists in Smyrna.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, Asbury Church's 1845 physical move afforded the African American portion of the congregation a unique opportunity to worship separately. As Mr. Caley describes, the Asbury Trustees then had a dilemma to solve regarding what to do with the North and Delaware meeting house and site, including two cemetery sections: one known to this day as Old Asbury cemetery (presumably the white section), and the

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings: The Long Hidden Realities of the First Years* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 102.

<sup>7</sup> However, the continuing dual motivation for maintaining ethnically homogeneous congregations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be assessed in chapters three and four.

other the section (presumably African American), the rediscovery of which became the catalyst for this study.

They had to deal with a large cemetery lot; a gapping hole located in part of it, and a vacant building. After several months of discussion a decision was reached. They would keep the white section of the cemetery; ask the villagers to use the hole as a dump, give the colored people their cemetery section (yet unused) which was located on the northern third of the lot and sell the building. (No mention has been found in any of the resource material concerning the de-consecration of the church.) That was the most untenable section of the plan. Nobody wanted a church—so the structure still remained. Finally Mr. Campbell Wells, the church sexton and pump maker purchased “only the new part.” He divided the building; moved his section to Ball Street, and made it his residence... The Negroes purchased the section that remained; moved it back onto their lot; closed in the opened end; and used the building as a house of worship.<sup>8</sup>

The meaning of the ‘(yet unused)’ parenthetical comment regarding the African American cemetery section in the above quotation is uncertain; and unfortunately, the author is no longer living so was unavailable to shed light on it. It seems reasonable to assume the author’s intent was to indicate the African American cemetery section began to be used for segregated burials by the semi-independent African American portion of Asbury from 1845 onward. At the time of the public search in 2006 for Next-of-Kin to those buried at the site, records provided by Faries Funeral Directors, Incorporated, however, indicated that there were burials of African Americans at the Old Asbury site as early as 1822.<sup>9</sup>

It is clear, however, that from 1845 through 1858, African American Methodists associated with Asbury were sufficiently distinct as a congregation to purchase a portion of the old Asbury building and use it as a house of worship. During this time formal ties remained with the Asbury congregation. “Their spiritual needs were met by the preaching of a visiting preacher or the resident minister of Asbury. As was the custom in

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<sup>8</sup> Caley, 35.

<sup>9</sup> A public notice by the City of Smyrna, Delaware, *The Smyrna-Clayton Sun-Times*, 10 May 2006, 19.

those days the Trustees of Asbury were also the trustees of this Negro Church and congregation.”<sup>10</sup>

In 1849, a portion of the African American believers using the old Asbury building as a house of worship helped to form a new, distinct congregation in the Smyrna area, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, which erected its first building in 1851. Though this new congregation attempted to purchase the old Asbury building, others worshipping there wanted to retain ties to Asbury and the Methodist Episcopal denomination, and continued doing so until 1858, when services there were discontinued.

Between 1858 and 1876, though, African American Methodists in Smyrna still associated with the Methodist Episcopal Church continued to meet for prayer, study and worship, primarily in homes. The 1857 records of the Convention of Colored Local Preachers of the Methodist Episcopal Church indicate the Easton District comprised nine preachers, 486 members and 31 probationers, including the Smyrna, Dover, and Milford Circuits.<sup>11</sup> By 1864, the minutes of the first session of the Delaware Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church report the appointment of Elder James Davis to the Smyrna circuit, consisting of 95 members in four congregations.<sup>12</sup> Since these bodies of believers in the Smyrna area were receiving spiritual oversight from African American preachers associated with the Methodist Episcopal Church between 1857 and 1876, it can be assumed that one or more of these congregations had a part in formalizing Centennial Methodist Episcopal Church in 1876.

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<sup>10</sup> George L. Caley, historian and editor, *Duck Creek Cross Roads = Smyrna, Delaware, Bicentennial, 1768—1968: A Brief History of Smyrna, Delaware, Illustrated* (Smyrna, Delaware, 1968), 95.

<sup>11</sup> *A Commemorative Booklet*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

Both Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and Centennial United Methodist Church continue as active congregations in Smyrna to this day. As Asbury United Methodist Church seeks to forge in the present a Christ-centered, grace-filled response to its own past, its ongoing relationship with these two congregations, and particularly with Centennial Church, becomes a focus of this project. At least two of the ten living persons formally identified by the State as Next-of-Kin to those buried at the site are active members of Centennial. While neither the Bethel nor Centennial congregations claim any formal or legal ties to the cemetery, as historic African American institutions in the Smyrna community, and as having some shared history with Asbury and the site in question, they have obvious interest in the resolution of the matter.

Returning to historical background, by 1868 the site was publicly known as an “African Cemetery” and appears labeled as such in a map contained in *Beers Atlas of the State of Delaware* of that year.<sup>13</sup> In deed references from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the site is denoted variously as “the lands of the Colored Graveyard,” or “the Colored Cemetery.” During the pre- and post-Civil War era it can be assumed that citizens of Smyrna engaged in segregated burial practices, and that this continued on into at least the mid to early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As noted in 2000 by James Newton, University of Delaware professor of Black American Studies, “Before the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, blacks often could not be buried in the same cemeteries as whites. And records such as birth certificates and identification papers for older blacks are rare.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Brandon Leamy, “Search for Relatives of Deceased in Unmarked Cemetery,” *The Smyrna-Clayton Sun-Times*, 10 May 2006, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted by Stephanie L. Arnold, “A Key Link to African-Americans’ Past Is Crumbling,” *The News Journal*, 10 January 2000, 1, 8A.



A difficult question to answer concerning these gravesites concerns the circumstances under which individual burial decisions were made. Was the site limited to burials of African Americans who were Methodists or was it something of a quasi-public burial place for anyone of African descent? Whether confined to Methodists or not, did families of the deceased purchase burial rights from Asbury Church or any other entity, or were these provided free of charge? Was any formal or implied perpetual care contract part of any of these burials? The answer to these questions may never be known. Two observations become clear, though, from the facts that are known. First, in the years following the presumed last burials on the site in the 1930s, neither Asbury Church nor anyone in the African American community claimed responsibility for the ongoing public recognition and maintenance of this 0.6 acre site as a cemetery. Second, though records concerning the exact location and number of persons, and the circumstances in which they were buried at the site are unclear, the fact that the portion of the old Asbury site north of present North Street was publicly recognized as an African American cemetery from 1868 at least until the early 1950s is not in question. Also not in question is the fact that Asbury Church held legal title to the site until its sale to the American Legion in 1976.

This plot of land's public recognition and use as a cemetery becomes less certain after 1950. One long-time member of Asbury remembers that when she moved to Smyrna in the 1930s as a child there were several old tombstones marking the cemetery, though "several were falling over and none were in real good shape." Another longtime member of Asbury recalls delivering mail in the Smyrna community in the years 1948-1951 and remembers seeing extant tombstones on the north side of North Street as he

made his daily rounds in the area. Another witness, who was born in 1945 and grew up in a home adjacent to cemetery property, recalls playing on the site as a child, though she was told by her mother not to do so because it was a burial ground. However, she does not recall any extant tombstones. A photograph from Asbury Church archives dated approximately 1970 shows the view of this entire site looking north from the Old Asbury cemetery toward the American Legion building. No tombstones are visible, only mown grass.

The City of Smyrna's 2006 public newspaper notice in search of Next-of-Kin indicated that the last recorded burial of an African American at Old Asbury M. E. Cemetery by the Faries Funeral Directors was in 1939. The notice also indicates, however, that these records were not necessarily comprehensive.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the exact location of this individual grave or those graves of any other African Americans buried between 1822 and 1839 at the Old Asbury site cannot be determined. This is true regarding the gravesites' specific locations in reference to present day North Street (the apparent boundary marking off the African American burial section),<sup>16</sup> as well as the specific locations of any graves within the publicly recognized African-American section.

The public newspaper notice also indicated that the unmarked 0.6 acre African American cemetery section was physically capable of containing as many as 200 burials, though only 16 burial sites were actually positively identified by state archeologists in 2005. Over 150 African-American or mixed-race persons of varying ages are listed in the notice as having been buried at Old Asbury by Faries Funeral Directors between 1822 and 1939. Since eyewitness accounts of grave monuments from 1930 to 1950 seem to

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<sup>15</sup> *The Smyrna Clayton Sun-Times*, 10 May 2006, 19.

<sup>16</sup> Though improbable, it is conceivable that despite convention or local law, some African American or mixed race persons were buried south of North Street prior to 1939.

indicate there were not nearly that many gravestones extant, it may be assumed that a sizable portion of the burials on this site were never marked or had become unmarked prior to 1930. However, as indicated by eyewitness accounts, there were some grave markers extant between 1930 and 1950. Also, and as acknowledged by the Asbury Trustees in the codicil to the deed of sale to the American Legion in 1976, at some point after 1950 all remaining grave monuments were removed without relocating any actual gravesites. The wording of the codicil, “proper removal of grave monuments,” seems to rule out their natural decomposition and indicates an intentional removal by someone. The aforementioned 1970 photograph indicates that this removal of gravestones, for which the Trustees sought permission from state authorities in 1976, had already occurred prior to 1970.

Therefore, what may be stated with certainty regarding this site’s history prior to its 1976 sale is as follows. As early as 1822 African Americans were buried somewhere within the bounds of the Old Asbury property; from as early as 1845 until some time after 1939 the northern-most 0.6 acre of this property was used as an African American burial site, and was publicly recognized and recognizable as such due to extant grave monuments on the site until at least 1950; and sometime between 1950 and 1970 the cemetery became completely and intentionally unmarked, and less and less recognizable as a cemetery.

The question of exactly when extant grave markers were removed and by whom remains unanswered. Some issues surrounding the matter remain unclear, and may never be adequately resolved, particularly in the hearts of some church members and Next-of-Kin. What can be examined, however, is the general climate of the church and

community regarding racial attitudes and race-relations, over the entire historical period, and particularly during 1950-1976.

### **Smyrna Race Relations and Racial Attitudes 1776-2005**

Smyrna, boasting an estimated population of approximately 7,500 in 2005, is located in the northern part of Kent County, Delaware. Although European settlers began living in the Duck Creek area from the late 1600s, the present town was laid out in 1768, and formally named Smyrna by an act of the Delaware Legislature in 1806. Throughout its existence, as with many Delaware towns of similar size, Smyrna has served as a small business and financial center for the largely agricultural area surrounding it. Also, in addition to some light manufacturing entities, two state institutions, the Delaware Correctional Center (the state's largest prison) and the Delaware Home and Hospital for the Chronically Ill are situated in or near Smyrna. The town is located approximately thirty-five miles south of Wilmington (population 78,000), Delaware's largest city, and twelve miles north of Dover, the state capital.

Delaware roughly occupies the northeastern quadrant of the Delmarva Peninsula on the Mid-Atlantic seaboard, and is divided into three counties comprising the northern, central and southern sections of this geographically small state. However, in common parlance, perhaps tracing from its early colonial period when the area was considered the "three lower counties" of Pennsylvania, all Delawareans know that everything south of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal is considered "lower Delaware" or "downstate" while everything north of the canal is called "northern Delaware" or "upstate." Because the canal runs east-west through New Castle County, Delaware's northern-most county, roughly dividing the county in two, fully four-fifths of the state is considered "lower

Delaware.” Therefore, though Smyrna is easily within the northern half of the state and occupies an area in northern Kent County along its border with New Castle County, the area is still considered part of “lower Delaware.” Though cultural and political realities are more complex than the following assertion allows, it is generally accepted that while northern Delaware tends to gravitate politically, culturally and socially toward Philadelphia and the northeastern United States; lower Delaware has resembled the American South culturally and socially more than the Northeast.

What may be said with more certainty is that throughout its history, Smyrna, along with all of Delaware and the mid-Atlantic region in general, has reflected an interesting mixture of cultural and social realities associated with both the more conservative “red state” American South and the more liberal “blue state” Northeast. This is particularly true in regard to racial attitudes and practices. During the antebellum and Civil War eras, when Asbury’s African American cemetery section was first being utilized, Delaware was considered a “Border State,” along with Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri. These states, reflecting the social milieu of their southern neighbors particularly with regard to race, maintained the legality of slavery even after the emancipation proclamation; yet in concert with their northern neighbors, maintained loyalty to the union. This culturally schizophrenic identity as a border state continues to affect attempts easily to categorize it socially and culturally to this day, as is evidenced by Delaware Senator Joseph Biden’s recent politically awkward attempt to nuance his and Delaware’s cultural categorization by the national media as “liberal Northeastern” by reminding them, “My state was a slave state.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Jennifer Brooks, “Biden’s Ability to Court South Questioned,” *The News Journal* (Wilmington, Delaware), 29 August 2006, A2.

### Independence to Civil War 1776-1865

Evidence cited by local historian William Williams suggests that three realities regarding racial attitudes and relationships found expression within Peninsula Methodism in the post-revolutionary and antebellum periods. These three realities were neither mutually exclusive nor easily harmonized. More like oil, water, and vinegar, for a period of time they coexisted and found themselves historically intermingled; yet there was an underlying tendency for them to become distinct and evidence their incompatibility. One was the wholehearted embrace of Methodist theology and spirituality by many Peninsula African Americans. A second reality was the theological and spiritual impetus behind the abolition movement. Many early Peninsula Methodists were ardently anti-slavery because of their spiritual experience of “one new man,” race-inclusive theology, and as an expression of their concern for social holiness. For instance, Allen McLane, who had donated the land for Asbury’s first building (and the cemetery in question), was elected president of the Delaware Abolitionist Society in 1803.<sup>18</sup> Such antislavery sentiment continued to be expressed in Smyrna through the Civil War period.

By 1857 ... already many persons had permitted themselves to consolidate their sympathies with either the North or the South. The temperance movement had entered the political picture with most of its advocates also against slavery, the Fugitive Slave Law and the Dred Scott Decision. In Smyrna most of the temperance advocates were Methodists.<sup>19</sup>

However, a third reality coexisting within Methodism as well as within the culture at large was a clear attitude of racial superiority by many, if not most, white persons. This attitude is commonly associated with the pro-slavery American south yet was surely not

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<sup>18</sup> William H. Williams, *The Garden of American Methodism* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1984), 164.

<sup>19</sup> Caley, *A History of Asbury United Methodist Church*, 39.

limited thereto.<sup>20</sup> This attitude could be expressed, even by abolitionists, in a “kinder, gentler” form of paternalistic concern; or, to the other extreme, in the brutality described by Frederick Douglas of the reportedly devout Methodist “slave-breaker” Edward Covey, of near-by Talbot County, Maryland in 1834.<sup>21</sup> Methodist itinerant William Colbert, in speaking of African American Methodists, said “care ought to be taken to keep them humble,” yet also asserted with the apostle Paul that because “God made of one blood all nations of men,” African Americans ought not to “be spoken to as brutes and slaves.”

While serving the Milford circuit in southern Delaware in 1795, however, Colbert was rudely awakened to the depth of racial feelings on the Peninsula. At two preaching stops he was rebuked by whites for referring to blacks as “brethren and sisters.”<sup>22</sup>

Williams also notes that “Peninsula Methodism was more successful at loosening fetters of institutional slavery than it was in altering white racial attitudes,” and “By the second decade of the nineteenth century it was evident that Peninsula Methodists were losing some of their antislavery fervor.” Noll’s assertion that even the Civil War and its results “did not persuade most Caucasian Americans that African Americans were on their level of humanity,” is difficult to refute, and it must be assumed that this attitude was finding expression within Smyrna Methodism and the community at large during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and probably across its hostile-to-benign spectrum of expression.<sup>23</sup>

By the time of the Civil War, it becomes apparent that despite the commingling of these three realities within Smyrna Methodism, the tendency for them to become distinct and give rise to conflict was being experienced. By this time, most if not all African

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<sup>20</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 51-74. Note the title of his chapter 4, “The negro question lies far deeper than the slavery question.”

<sup>21</sup> Frederick Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (Antislavery Office, 1845; rpt. New York: Barnes and Noble, 2003), 59-70. See also Williams, 207, note 21.

<sup>22</sup> Williams, 166-167

<sup>23</sup> Noll, 74.

American Methodists previously associated with Asbury, had become, for all intents and purposes, part of independent African-American, formal or informal (though still Methodist) fellowships. In 1861, William Bishop was appointed as Pastor of Asbury Church. “Although this man of God was a strong supporter of the union Cause, he never lost his faith in the fight of the Church against the world, the flesh and the devil. He was an anti-slavery preacher, who preached against the evils of the system, yet he also preached about God’s love for man.”<sup>24</sup> Conflict within the congregation over his stand may well be reflected in the fact that he was removed by the Presiding Elder the following year, but reinstated after his friends in the church officially protested. The continuing dividedness of both the town and the Asbury congregation is further noted in the observation, “The great moral conflict that raged throughout the country between 1850 and 1865 did not escape Smyrna’s secular or religious attention. Because this town was a divided one during the Civil War, Asbury’s records are silent except for the routine business that was conducted.”<sup>25</sup>

#### Two Issues: Race as Distinct from Slavery, and Spiritual Drift

The commingling and inevitable tension among these three realities within Asbury Church and society as a whole in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century -- namely the lively and culturally relevant embrace of Methodist spirituality by African Americans; the theological and ideological embrace of the antislavery movement by some, though not all, Peninsula Methodists; and the widespread, though variously expressed attitude of racial superiority by Caucasians -- the commingling yet inherent tension among these three realities raises two issues to be examined in more detail in chapter three. One issue

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<sup>24</sup> Caley, *A History of Asbury United Methodist Church*, 40.

<sup>25</sup> Caley, *Smyrna, Delaware*, 87.



is the distinction between the Civil War and Emancipations Proclamation's coercive resolution of the question of slavery on the one hand, together with the continuing non-resolution of the question of race on the other. A second issue is American Methodism's engagement with the wider culture during its period of consolidation from spiritual movement to mainline denomination during this period,<sup>26</sup> including the resultant effect on its spiritual life in general, and on its racial attitudes and practices in particular. Both strengths and vulnerabilities inherent in the larger Methodist history relating to these two issues will be examined briefly in chapter three, and insights applied to Asbury's present response in chapters four and five.

### Reconstruction through Bicentennial

During reconstruction and into the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it appears that Smyrna Methodism followed a similar pattern with the nation at large as it relates to race relations and racial attitudes. Asbury, Bethel, and Centennial Churches seem to have continued their development along largely segregated lines, with little formal fellowship or communication, and that this was seen as normal and not questioned. Interestingly, it is during this period that many active burials in the African American cemetery (still owned by Asbury) presumably were taking place.

However, the larger national Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, together with the racial tensions experienced within many U.S. urban areas in the 1960s through the early 1970s seem to have affected, and found local expression in Smyrna. It is especially important to gauge racial attitudes and race relations during the 1950-1976 time period, because it was within this time-span that extant gravestones most likely were

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<sup>26</sup> See David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 179-201.

removed intentionally and the land sold by the church as a presumably construction-appropriate lot.

Racial attitudes and race relations in the Smyrna area during this period seem to reflect the tensions and opportunities experienced by the rest of the nation, in some ways resembling other rural small towns in the south, in other ways resembling more urban areas of the northeast. Both negative reaction to, and positive engagement with, the wider national civil rights movement and the issues the movement was addressing, clearly were felt in Smyrna.

On the more negative side, two citations appearing in the *News Journal* during the mid-1960s posit uncertain associations with an allegedly resurgent and politically influential Ku Klux Klan in Delaware and persons in the Smyrna area. Columnist Bill Frank recalled that back in the 1920s a farmer near Smyrna had tried publicly to denounce the Ku Klux Klan, while the state Democratic Convention of 1924 officially chose not to denounce the Klan publicly by a vote of 140-55. Nevertheless, the 1965 column goes on to assert that the Klan never revived much in Delaware after the 1920s.<sup>27</sup> This raises some interesting though probably unanswerable questions regarding Delaware racial politics and attitudes of the 1920s, while the Asbury African American cemetery's active use was drawing to a close. Though the Klan and its methods clearly were opposed by many, if not most, Delawareans, some sympathy with its concerns was clearly being felt in the state. This assertion seems to be confirmed by another article appearing later that same year (1965). The article surveys various local politicians' views regarding present Klan influence and included reference to repeated claims by the grand dragon of the Delaware Klan that a Delaware legislator was a Klansman. In contrast to

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<sup>27</sup> Bill Frank, *The Morning News*, 3 March 1965, 14.

several politicians' dismissive remarks regarding Klan influence as only associated with a "lunatic fringe," a Smyrna legislator is quoted referring positively to the Klan as people only "trying to get good government," and "I guess you could say I'm not opposed to the situation." According to the article, while the Klan grand dragon claims that he and another "Klansman in the Smyrna area" were responsible for recruiting the General Assembly member, this particular Smyrna legislator denies he is a Klan member. Perhaps more tellingly, again according to the article, another legislator from nearby Kenton dismisses any "great political influence" of "the Klan itself," but notes, "I feel reasonably sure that some are sympathetic to the cause."<sup>28</sup> Therefore, in 1965, in the region's major newspaper, direct Ku Klux Klan political influence could be dismissed easily by virtually all upstate politicians quoted, yet some sympathy for its cause was seriously and publicly acknowledged by Smyrna area local legislators. The tension inherent in this observation must have been felt and expressed within the community's overall race relations and racial attitudes at every level, including among the churches.

Because of its longstanding social position within the community, often counting many local leaders from the realms of education, politics and business among its members, Asbury, along with Centennial and Bethel Churches, must have been affected by these concerns. Again, it is difficult to assess the exact manner or extent to which not only official involvement in the Klan, but also sympathy with, or rejection of its racial ideology found expression in the churches and the Smyrna social reality of the 1950s and 1960s. Nevertheless, it was a publicly discussed local issue during a time when the Civil Rights movement was gaining national exposure, public school desegregation was being

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<sup>28</sup> Ralph S. Moyed, "He Doesn't Have Card, He Claims: Smyrna's Busker Defends Klan," *The Evening Journal* (Wilmington, Delaware), 13 October 1965, 3.

undertaken in the Smyrna School district, and racial tensions were being experienced on a large scale in urban areas across the country. The fact that it was during this general time frame that Asbury's African-American cemetery became completely and unexplainably unmarked does not necessarily establish a cause and effect relationship among any of these realities, but it does help describe the social milieu in which it happened.

There is also evidence, though, of constructive engagement with civil rights concerns and constructive attempts to improve race relations in the Smyrna area and among its churches during the later part of the 1950-1976 time period. Following the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in April of 1968 Asbury hosted an interdenominational community service in his honor and memory.<sup>29</sup> In an event referred to in local media at the time as "the disturbances," underlying racial tensions boiled over for four days on or around Labor Day weekend of 1969. A local NAACP delegation asked the Delaware Attorney General at the time "to investigate the disorders and tactics police used in handling them." In response a Bi-Racial Committee was formed after a meeting which included then Governor Russell W. Peterson and the State's Human Relations Commission. The balanced local Committee was comprised initially of five white persons and five black persons and expanded later to include ten more persons in each group.<sup>30</sup> Members associated with Bethel, Centennial, and Asbury Churches were part of this community group.

By March of 1970 the State Human Relations Commission felt that tensions had eased to the point it could disengage itself. An official cited the following evidences of "an upswing and more positive turn of events."

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<sup>29</sup> Caley, *A History of Asbury United Methodist Church*, 64.

<sup>30</sup> "Bi-Racial Committee Newly Formed," *The Morning News* (Wilmington, Delaware), 20 September 1969, 36.

- Tensions were alleviating in the schools;
- the Bi-racial Committee, originally formed after Labor Day Disturbances as an attempt to solve the town's racial problems, had been reactivated;
- Police were engaged in recreational activities with youth;
- Through self examination, townspeople were beginning to admit that there was polarization between blacks and whites.<sup>31</sup>

Also around this time the Smyrna-Clayton Ministerium was formed, at least in part, in order to respond constructively to racial tensions in the community. Among other initiatives, a community food pantry was established at Asbury and both the Ministerium and food pantry, as well as several other social ministries continue to operate to this day. However, active involvement among all clergy, and involvement of African American clergy in particular, has waxed and waned in this group through the years.

Other evidence of attempts within the churches and larger community to affect race relations constructively can be seen in the election of George W. Wright to town council in 1969, and as Mayor in 1981, an office he would hold for seven consecutive two-year terms. Wright, an active lay leader of Bethel AME Church to this day, was Smyrna's first African American town council member and Delaware's first African American mayor, something about which Smyrna citizens of all races remain justifiably proud. Also, in 1969 Asbury and Centennial churches were placed together on a pastoral charge, maintaining their distinctiveness as two separate congregations, but being served by Asbury's pastor, a situation that was to continue until 1985. Although at least a portion of the motivation for this arrangement may have been financial necessity, as opposed to race relations concerns, it provided a vehicle through which the congregations

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<sup>31</sup> "Tensions Ease, State Unit Out of Smyrna," *The Evening Journal* (Wilmington, Delaware), 13 March 1970, 27.

could work more closely together.<sup>32</sup> The Rev. Ira Steckman served as pastor of Asbury and Centennial Churches from 1970 to 1978, and despite signing off on the sale of the African American cemetery to the American Legion in 1976, he was later commended by Centennial Church historians for “stressing togetherness through combined programs between the two churches.”<sup>33</sup> In 2006, members of both Asbury and Centennial Churches who were active during the 1970s recalled Steckman as a “beloved pastor,” and found it difficult to believe he could have been involved knowingly in a racially insensitive or unjust action.<sup>34</sup>

Despite these constructive efforts regarding racial attitudes and race relations in the churches and community in the decades just prior to 1976 sale, evidence of racial tension during the period, which to some extent continues subtly to this day, and differing perceptions of this tension, persist. George Wright had to run five times for town council, and three times for mayor before being elected. For his first successful mayoral campaign, at the advice of a friend, he chose not to include a photograph of himself in campaign literature. In speaking of a 1999 interview with Wright and Mary Maloy Scott, Smyrna’s first African American School Superintendent, News Journal reporter James Merriweather opined, “Wright and Scott together painted Smyrna as representative of a region that still has not completely put behind its tradition of racism.” Merriweather also noted the fact that “the last six of Wright’s mayoral terms were won without contest, prompting even black people to call into question his motives,” and Wright’s response at

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<sup>32</sup> Caley, *A History of Asbury United Methodist Church*, 64, puts it this way, “Circumstances of time and place put into Reverend Hays’ hands the ministry of two congregations—Asbury and Centennial. After 112 years time these two entities were again served by the same pastor. It is to Reverend Hays’ credit that this union was made with peace and goodwill.”

<sup>33</sup> *A Commemorative Booklet*, appendix, 5.

<sup>34</sup> These perceptions were shared by members of the “*Steps Toward Wholeness* study group” discussed in chapter 5.

the time, “A lot of people said I was an Uncle Tom. I don’t think I was, but I know how the game is played well enough to know that a lot of us wouldn’t be sitting here if not for the element known as Uncle Tom.”<sup>35</sup>

In subtle contrast in perspective, some present members of Asbury Church who recall the period may acknowledge relations among ethnic groups as a continuing concern locally and nationally in a broad sense; yet when issues with a racial undertone have surfaced in recent months in local politics, surprise and slight defensiveness is a normal reaction. In so many words, apparently demonstrating unawareness of the subtle dynamics of power and race expressed in the “Uncle Tom” comments above, the perspective expressed is: “How can it be insinuated that we have a race problem? We even had a Black mayor.” The assumption is that the issue of race may no longer be substantive. While acknowledging that the issue of race can be raised inappropriately and politically “demagogued,” these reactions point out not only how subtle are the dynamics, but how differently racial issues can and could be perceived by African Americans and by even the most well-meaning white persons, now as well as in the 1950-1976 time period. A further public comment by Wright in 2004 may best point out the distinction between the more attention-getting “disturbances” of 1969 and the more subtle, persistent, underlying attitude of racism that not only persists, but was a tangible, though underlying reality three decades ago.

Smyrna used to have a reputation for racism. Was that reputation deserved?

If you remember the headlines in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, Smyrna was perceived as being one of the most racist towns in the state of Delaware. There were some problems, but it seemed to revolve around the younger kids who were

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<sup>35</sup> James Merriweather, “Trailblazers Recall History of Race Relations,” *The News Journal* (Wilmington, Delaware), 17 June 1999, 1, 2B.

starting to have some fights on the streets. They called them riots, but I didn't see them as riots, just young adults sowing their oats. The adults were kind of standoffish. Even though the racism was there, it was still kind of subtle.<sup>36</sup>

In summary, this much can be stated with some certainty regarding the racial attitudes and race relations among Asbury Church and its fellow Smyrna congregations, as well as within the greater community during the years leading up to the sale of the cemetery to the American Legion in 1976. Reflecting its broader mid-Atlantic social and cultural milieu, Smyrna Methodism and the community as a whole was responding to calls for greater civil rights from and on behalf of its African American citizenry. Some sympathy with a white superiority backlash resonated within the community at large during the 1960s. Though it is difficult to assess the extent across a continuum to which it was embraced, subtly internalized, dismissed, feared, or flatly rejected by members of Asbury and the other churches, it was an undeniably present undercurrent. A brief period of racial violence occurred and received public, statewide attention. Still, in retrospect, while a more subtle, persistent, variously perceived racism was being experienced throughout the period, and most likely affected Asbury and others with regard to its African American cemetery; serious attempts were being made by church members and others to express their faith positively and constructively in matters of racial justice and reconciliation.

#### Cemetery Sale to Rediscovery 1976-2005

Since 1918, Centennial Church has met on East Mount Vernon Street, just two blocks east of Asbury's building on West Mount Vernon. This physical proximity along with shared denominational ties have afforded Asbury and Centennial Churches ample

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<sup>36</sup> J. L. Miller, "Black History Delaware Stories," *The News Journal* (Wilmington, Delaware), 17 March 2004, 1, 2B.



opportunities for shared ministry across the decades. Greater distance in physical location and distinct denominational affiliation have contributed historically to a more independent, though still cordial, relationship between Asbury and Bethel Churches, as compared to the more active relationship between Centennial and Asbury.

At the time of the cemetery sale in 1976, Centennial and Asbury churches were still yoked together and shared a pastor. Thirty years later, in 2006, several persons who were active members of both congregations at the time had no recollection of the sale in 1976. One Centennial member recalled only becoming aware of the land being owned by the American Legion several years after the sale had taken place. Asbury Charge Conference (annual business meeting) or Official Board records are not available for 1976, so it is uncertain whether the sale was discussed in any congregation-wide meeting. According to United Methodist polity in force at the time, the congregation's elected Board of Trustees was responsible for property matters and was authorized to sell property as long as the Pastor and District Superintendent approved. As previously mentioned, both Asbury's pastor, as well as the District Superintendent at the time, a former Asbury pastor, signed a denominational document authorizing the sale.

While this sale or its implications were not registering in the awareness of many, if not most, rank and file church members, the Asbury and Centennial Congregations continued to engage in shared ministry and relationships. Although the "shared pastor" situation was ended officially in 1985 at Centennial's request, 2006 study group members were quick to point out the motivation for the request was a strong desire for more culturally relevant worship leadership and not necessarily due to dissatisfaction with the Centennial-Asbury relationship. As one participant succinctly put it, "It was cultural, not

racial,” recalling Mitchell’s distinction between oppression-avoidance and mission-pursuit in the founding of distinctly African-American congregations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup> Sensitivity to cultural differences associated with race in church life and how best to respond to these distinctive spiritual cultures will be explored in chapter four.

Following Centennial’s return to receiving its own pastor, the two congregations continued to work together in practical ways. Beginning from the early 1990s Centennial and Asbury participated in a cooperative, ecumenical outreach called Shalom, and in a local United Methodist effort called Mission Area Ministry along with the other six United Methodist congregations in northern Kent County. As part of these efforts, numerous musical programs, fellowship events and social outreaches were conducted including consistent participation from some members of both Asbury and Centennial. Though the official Mission Area Ministry program has ended, many of these activities are continuing, and were ongoing at the time of the cemetery rediscovery. Also, for more than twelve months in 2002-2003, following a fire that necessitated the rebuilding of Centennial’s Sanctuary, the Centennial congregation used Asbury’s chapel for worship in a cooperative arrangement that seemed to suit both congregations.

While both of these historic congregations have had their shares of temporal struggles and a few periods of growth, the relative size of the congregations remained stable through the period, as it had throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the time of the cemetery rediscovery in 2005, Centennial had 106 members with an average worship attendance of 75, while Asbury membership stood at 579 with an average worship attendance of 238.

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<sup>37</sup> Mitchell, 102.

Whatever may have been the effects of a subtle, persistent underlying racial tension upon Smyrna Methodism and the larger community between 1976 and 2005, it did not prevent Asbury and Centennial Churches from engaging in limited but effective cooperative ministry. How the congregations were able to utilize and build on the positives of this relationship in response to the cemetery rediscovery will be examined in chapter five.

### **A Struggle of Competing Myths**

Before moving on in subsequent chapters to an examination of biblical-theological, historical, and practical ministry resources from which Asbury Church might draw in crafting a God-honoring response to the rediscovery of its own past decisions regarding its African American cemetery, a defining struggle with spiritual and psychological dimensions needs to be described. Using the term “myth” in its technical, theological, meaning-laden sense as opposed to its popular sense as referring to something imaginary or fictitious, the struggle concerns which myth will prevail ultimately in the congregations, and the entire community’s, spiritual and psychological approach to its own past.

Psychologists and family therapists have long described “games families play,” including “spooks, ghosts, and mystification.” Popular terms such “skeletons in the closet” or trying to “bury the past” point to a powerful tendency within human nature to manage painful or embarrassing or downright evil aspects of one’s past by seeking to hide them away or to deny their existence. Well meaning family members may seek to shield and protect others from their harmful effects. According to family therapist and theologian, J. C. Wynn, “The family belief system protects [its own] image... shielding a

family embarrassment... Secrets often inspire a family to withhold information.”<sup>38</sup> In the lack of information forthcoming regarding not only the decision to appraise and sell the plot as construction-appropriate land, but perhaps more importantly, the facts surrounding the prior removal of extant grave monuments – one wonders whether a protective, “burying the past,” “let sleeping dogs lie” approach is not powerfully operating.

The few Asbury Trustees from 1976 who are still living “don’t remember” the details surrounding the sale. Another long time member who was not a Trustee but was part of the Official Board recalls assuming at some point in the middle decades of the 20th century that Asbury had paid to relocate actual graves as well as monuments, remarking recently, “I guess we missed some.” There is a paper trail of official documents regarding the actual sale of land, but only a single, vague reference to the prior removal of grave monuments. When asked when and by whom these grave markers were removed, long time Asbury members uniformly respond, “I don’t know.” This lack of knowledge and memory may well be sincere, yet, the lack of information and guarded responses from people are not limited to Asbury members only. A City of Smyrna worker interviewing persons during the search for next-of-kin described a reluctance by “both sides” (referring to the racial identity of townspeople) to go beyond a certain point in describing the history of the cemetery.

In his book, *Blood Done Sign My Name*, Timothy Tyson recalls going back several years after the fact to Oxford, North Carolina to research the social upheavals that accompanied the 1970 murder of Henry Marrow and its violent, racially charged aftermath. He describes a powerful reluctance on the part of many to “unbury” the past,

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<sup>38</sup> J. C. Wynn, *Family Therapy in Pastoral Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), 46.

as if a silent, community-wide pact had been entered into not to talk about this thing.<sup>39</sup>

Family therapy as well as long human experience teaches that buried secrets have a way of coming back to haunt us. That which we think we have “put to bed” or “buried,” if inadequately or unjustly resolved, often doesn’t stay buried.

It was pointed out that none of us possess a kind of fiat by which we can say, “Let bygones be bygones” and, hey presto, they then become bygones. Our common experience in fact is the opposite – that the past, far from disappearing or lying down and being quiet, has an embarrassing and persistent way of returning and haunting us unless it has in fact been dealt with adequately. Unless we look the beast in the eye we find it has an uncanny habit of returning to hold us hostage.<sup>40</sup>

Fortunately, Smyrna’s situation is far less intense in terms of the pain and injustice experienced by people in Oxford, North Carolina in the early 1970’s, let alone the people of South Africa under apartheid, yet the African-American graves at North and Delaware Streets, Smyrna, could not remain silent and unheeded forever. A too-quick, amnesia-accepting “let bygones be bygones” reburial is a natural and tempting way for Asbury’s present members and the larger community to want to move forward. The troublesome myth of buried secrets is a way to understand and find meaning in the rediscovery of these graves.

Yet there is another way, a better myth.

It is, quite simply, a new and living way,<sup>41</sup> in a word – resurrection. Interestingly, it is a way also strongly associated with images of burial grounds, cemeteries, skeletons and the like – a myth in which present participants may find meaning and be powerfully driven – not hauntingly, but healingly driven into the future by its reality. What if

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<sup>39</sup> Timothy Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), 294-299. Note his observation, 295, “It baffles me that people think that obliterating the past will save them from its consequences, as if throwing away the empty cake plate would help you lose weight.”

<sup>40</sup> Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York, Image Doubleday, 1999), 28.

<sup>41</sup> See Hebrews 10:20.

resurrection -- past event, promised hope, and present reality with all its spiritual resources -- were to become the prevailing truth by which persons ultimately processed this situation and moved into the future?

Desmond Tutu, in speaking of his experience with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, makes important distinctions between amnesia (pretending past injustices never happened) and amnesty (costly forgiveness for the purpose of restoration), and between retributive and restorative justice.<sup>42</sup> Only through cross and resurrection might past injustices and insensitivities be adequately examined, retribution set aside, restitution provided, and persons restored in community. In this perspective, resurrection, not buried secrets, becomes the spiritual framework in which persons will find meaning and hope (in this and every situation).

### **Next Steps**

Therefore several important questions emerge for Asbury Church in responding to the rediscovery of its African American gravesites. Which mythology or mentality will prevail ultimately -- “buried secrets” or resurrection? How might church members experience restorative justice, personally and corporately in community, for themselves and their forbears, enabled by a resurrecting, renewing God? Is it possible to respond to this situation by constructing and living out a practical, resurrection-based theology of spiritual renewal through repentance and racial reconciliation? This thesis project will argue that it is possible.

Chapter two will explore biblical and theological resources for constructing such a practical theology. Chapter three will examine Methodist history with regard to racial

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<sup>42</sup> Tutu, 21-30, 54-55, 155.

justice and reconciliation, and seek applicable insights based on both strengths and vulnerabilities therein. Chapter four will survey resources for pursuing spiritual renewal through racial reconciliation strategies and multi-ethnic ministry models. Finally, chapter five will describe Asbury Church's actual response from the time of the cemetery rediscovery to the present, and assess the response in light of the practical theology that has developed in chapters two – four.

Which myth will prevail? Indeed, can these bones live?





## CHAPTER TWO

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS: TOWARD A NEW REALITY

*For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one  
and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.  
He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might  
create within himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace,  
and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross,  
thus putting to death that hostility through it..  
--Ephesians 2;14-16, NRSV*

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will examine theological assumptions and biblical principles underlying a practical, resurrection-based theology of spiritual renewal through repentance and racial reconciliation. Such a theology will posit a synergistic link between racial reconciliation with justice on the one hand, and genuine revival on the other. Such a theology also will provide the Asbury congregation with a means by which it might view and process its own association with past racial injustice and insensitivity as an ironic catalyst for present spiritual renewal and growth. Three biblically demonstrable theological assumptions, relevant to the case at hand, underlie a practical theology of spiritual renewal through repentance and racial reconciliation. They are as follows: God loves to revive his people; racial reconciliation with justice is part and parcel of the new life God loves to rekindle in his people; and repentance, personal and corporate, is a necessary precursor for communities experiencing such revival.

### **God Loves to Revive**

Experiencing revival is God's continuing gracious invitation to his people. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. defines revival as "a time when believers witness an extraordinary work of God enlivening, strengthening, and elevating the spiritual life and vitality already possessed, but which life is now in a state of decline and is feeble, mediocre, and dull in its out-workings."<sup>1</sup> He also uses 2 Chronicles 14:7 as a benchmark text for defining revival from a biblical perspective, arguing that the phrase, "my people who are called by my name," can be rightly interpreted as indicating that the proper subjects of revival include not only ancient Israel, but also present day believers in Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Kaiser refers to J. Edwin Orr, who has written extensively on the subject of revival.<sup>3</sup> Orr defines revival using Acts 3:19 and the phrase, "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord," which unmistakably locates this divine impulse to revive in a New Testament context.<sup>4</sup> Kaiser's clear contention in identifying and exploring sixteen periods of revival across both the Old and New Testaments is that there is something inherent in the character of God that delights in reviving his people.

This will from "deep within the Trinity"<sup>5</sup> not only to redeem but constantly to revive the people of God is centrally, definitively illustrated in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, enabling a resurrection-based theology of spiritual renewal. Gordon Fee says, "The resurrection of Christ has determined our existence for all time and eternity. . . . That ought both to reform the way we currently live and to reshape our worship into seasons of

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<sup>1</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Revive Us Again: Biblical Insights for Encouraging Spiritual Renewal* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 21.

<sup>2</sup> Kaiser, 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, J. Edwin Orr, *The Flaming Tongue* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973).

<sup>4</sup> Kaiser, 7.

<sup>5</sup> William Willimon, *Thank God It's Friday: Encountering the Seven Last Words from the Cross* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 1.

unbridled rejoicing.”<sup>6</sup> Resurrection as prefigured in the Old Testament and described in the New Testament is a past event, present reality, and promised hope. As a past event Jesus’ bodily resurrection was attested as verified by eyewitnesses in the decades following his crucifixion.<sup>7</sup> Resurrection as a present reality was claimed by Jesus in his own person,<sup>8</sup> and referenced by epistle writers in exhorting contemporary believers to draw from its strength in living new and holy lives.<sup>9</sup> Resurrection as a present reality also is associated with the believing community’s experience of the Holy Spirit. As J. D. G. Dunn writes, “The Spirit’s life is not confined to a spiritual realm divorced from the material and social;” and this present, “life-giving Spirit is not independent of the risen Christ.”<sup>10</sup> Resurrection as promised hope in the New Testament refers not only to individual believers’ future bodily resurrection,<sup>11</sup> but also to the reconciliation and restoration “of all things,”<sup>12</sup> of all matter and matters, as they were originally intended in divine creative love -- what N. T. Wright refers to as God’s “setting the world to rights.”<sup>13</sup> Of this promised, all inclusive hope, H. Orton Wiley writes:

The dissolving of the earth, therefore, is not its annihilation, but the breaking of its bonds, the loosing of it to become what it was originally intended to be—its deliverance from the bondage of corruption. We regard this loosing as an exact parallel of the transformation of the earthly elements in the human body. In the same manner as a [human] body is dissolved by death and becomes the subject of decay, out of which it shall be raised immortal, incorruptible, in power and glory; so this earth as [humankind’s] habitation shall likewise be dissolved, but out of it

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<sup>6</sup> Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in F. F. Bruce, ed., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 780; cf. Psalm 85:6.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Mt. 28; Mk. 16; Lk. 24; John 20-21; Acts 3:15; 1 Co. 15:4.

<sup>8</sup> John 11:24-26

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Ro. 6:8-11; 8:11; Col. 3:1-11.

<sup>10</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, in David A. Hubbard et al., eds., *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), vol. 38A, 445-6.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Co. 15:50-58.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Co. 15:24-28, Col. 1:20.

<sup>13</sup> N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (NY: HarperCollins, 2006), 3-16.

shall appear in a comparable resurrection, the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Peter 3:13).<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the God who longs to revive his people of every time and place is a resurrecting God, One who possesses within Trinitarian, divine being the will and demonstrated ability not only to raise the dead (as if that were not impressive enough) but also to redeem, reconcile, and restore in cosmic scope all that is, was, and ever will be – as it ought to be. God loves not only to make something out of nothing and order out of chaos;<sup>15</sup> in sovereign, redeeming love, and without compromising absolute, divine holiness one iota, God also delights to make the lost found, the dead alive, the broken whole, the sick well, the old new, the captive free, and the unjust just. The Scriptural images seem to fall all over themselves in order to describe the fullness of the life and salvation God desires to bestow upon and rekindle in and among his children, as much and as often as is necessary for their good and his ultimate glory. God loves to revive his people. This theological assumption is no mere fanciful wish.<sup>16</sup> It is the undying passion of a resurrecting God.

### **Racial Reconciliation Part and Parcel of the New Life God Rekindles**

A second theological assumption under-girding the thesis posits a necessary connection between revival and racial reconciliation with justice. Racial and ethnic reconciliation is part and parcel of the resurrection life God longs to rekindle in his people. This assumed intersection between theological and social truth rests itself on three biblical principles. These principles are: the intentional racial and ethnic diversity in the heavenly vision of

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<sup>14</sup> H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1943), III, 319-20.

<sup>15</sup> Gn. 1.

<sup>16</sup> See Ps. 85:6.

worship around the throne of God in Revelation, prefigured in Pentecost and Jesus' use of Isaiah 56:7; Paul's insistence that the life, death, and resurrection of Christ precipitate a new social arrangement and status among Gentile and Jew; and Jesus' attitude toward the poor and marginalized, which confirms the normative nature of Mosaic legislation and the Prophets' frequent call for social justice among God's people, rooted in the "weightier aspects"<sup>17</sup> of Torah.

### Beginning with the End in Mind: The Vision of Heavenly Worship

Each week, and in many cases, every day, countless Christians around the globe, including the members of Asbury Church, Smyrna, pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Envisioning "as it is" and will be "in heaven" in order to find guidance for how to live today is to utilize a spiritual approach practiced and enabled by Jesus centuries before the guiding phrase, "begin with the end in mind: the habit of vision," was coined by an influential management expert.<sup>18</sup> Examining the vision portrayed in Revelation 5:9 provides means for positing a strong link between racial reconciliation and spiritual revival. In expounding this text, John Piper argues that the racial-ethnic diversity pictured therein is both purposeful and of infinite value. Therefore it has profound implications for present social realities. It is purposeful. He writes concerning the words "for God" in Revelation 5:9, "Blood-bought racial diversity and harmony is for the glory of God through Christ. It is all aiming at the all-satisfying, everlasting, God-centered, Christ-exalting experience of many colored worship." This purposeful racial-ethnic diversity in heaven also is of infinite value. "Think on it. The issue . . . in the

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<sup>17</sup> Mt. 23:23.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (NY: Free Press, 1990).

church is not small, because the price of racial diversity and harmony was infinite.”

Finally, he reasons that this vision must affect present Christian social reality:

Now if you agree with me on that – this purchase of a people from every tribe is intentional, purposeful, designed . . . then the implications for racial diversity and racial harmony in the church are huge. . . God designed, aimed, purposed to have a people that is very diverse. . . God intends these people to be in profound, God-centered harmony . . . You can’t have priests who hate each other and refuse to serve together in one temple, or live together in one neighborhood, or hang out together after hours. . . The kind of divisions and hostilities and prejudice and mistreatment and ridicule and suspicion that has existed in the church among races is unthinkable in view of what Christ is pursuing in this text.<sup>19</sup>

Though Revelation 5:9 may not be thought of often as a key text for social ethics, Piper makes a compelling case that wherever followers of Jesus today are not experiencing the racial harmony described therein, the new life a resurrecting God loves to rekindle in his people will include necessarily moving them toward the racial justice and reconciliation reflected in the vision.

Thus a Revelation 5:9 vision’s implication for the present Christian community would seem to indicate the need to work for a spiritual-social reality in which believers might express their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities together *without shame* and *without superiority*, with one caveat regarding cultural expression.<sup>20</sup> Christians can and should be enabled to express their diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural identities *without shame* because the multiethnic character of the heavenly worship vision is portrayed as divinely intentioned and infinitely valuable. Christians can and should be enabled to express their diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural identities *without superiority* vis-a-vis

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<sup>19</sup> John Piper, “God’s Pursuit of Racial Diversity at Infinite Cost,” (Minneapolis, January 14, 2001), a sermon preached at Bethlehem Baptist Church, [cited 10 January 2007]. Online: [www.soundofgrace.com/piper2/piper2001/01-14-01](http://www.soundofgrace.com/piper2/piper2001/01-14-01).

<sup>20</sup> This caveat will be discussed below.

one another, because the multiethnic vision of heavenly worship is portrayed as circular<sup>21</sup> and harmonious, without varying status levels for the varying ethnicities represented among the worshipping throng.

Thus, a distinctly Christian, spiritual-social reality in which persons and communities express their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities with neither shame nor superiority vis-à-vis one another – this would seem a worthy goal in light of Revelation 5:9. If such an intentionally-designed, divinely valued multi-racial, multiethnic, multi-cultural spiritual-social reality were likened to a mixture of fruit, it might appear as a fruit bowl or fruit salad, as opposed to a “fruit smoothie” on the one hand, or intentionally segregated bowls of fruit on the other.<sup>22</sup> A total cultural amalgamation or assimilation into a bland sameness suggested by a “fruit smoothie” or marmalade would be ruled out by the ethnic diversity that seems to persist permanently within the heavenly vision. Interestingly, no dominant ethnic “flavor” or “flavors” are identified in the vision. At the same time, a strict segregation into separate bowls also would seem to be ruled out by the fact that the Revelation 5:9 vision includes not several bowls and several Christ’s, but only one “worship bowl,” in which the entire throng of redeemed diverse humanity, in concert with all created beings and things, works together harmoniously and synergistically to raise endless praise, honor and glory to the One “Lamb who was Slain.”

This “on earth as it is in heaven” goal of a fruit-salad-resembling spiritual-social reality in which Christians together express their diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural identities with neither shame nor superiority is in stark contrast to two biblical-

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<sup>21</sup> Note the phrase “around the throne” in Rv. 5:11.

<sup>22</sup> This fruit imagery describing a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural context is suggested in the video segment, “Mauritius,” regarding multi-cultural synergy, part of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People Signature Program* (Franklin/Covey, 2005).

theological schools of thought regarding what spiritual-social reality *ought to be* the Christian community's goal upon this earth in terms of race, ethnicity, and culture. One school of thought was the interpretive theology used to justify the race-based enslavement of Africans and other non-European peoples during periods of western colonial expansion, and especially in America in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>23</sup> The other is the theological rationale for the homogeneous unit principle developed by missiologists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as an intentional strategy for cross-cultural missions.

The race-based pro-slavery theology rested primarily on a particular understanding of the curse of Ham,<sup>24</sup> ancient Israel's practice of slavery, and the apparent non-proscription of the practice of Greco-Roman slavery in the New Testament. This theological perspective on the social ethics of race primarily was resisted, but in some cases supported and furthered, by Methodists in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>25</sup> Though the theology has been refuted by persons across the racial spectrum on biblical, moral, and scholarly grounds<sup>26</sup> and does not seem to be taken seriously today; Noll and others suggest that despite the Civil War and the formal end to slavery in America, many unexamined sociological assumptions regarding race, ethnicity and culture inherent in the theology were too deeply imbedded in the lives of many Christians (and most Caucasian Americans) to be easily abandoned.

Advocates of emancipationist biblical arguments who in 1860 still wanted to keep blacks out of the territories and still expected colonization to solve the United State's racial problem – not to speak of those who felt that the whole of the Bible

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<sup>23</sup> For a summary of principles associated with this theology see Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 35.

<sup>24</sup> Gn. 9:18-27

<sup>25</sup> See below, chapter 3, for vulnerabilities and strengths inherent in this 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Methodist theology and practice, including insights regarding contemporary race relations.

<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Cain Hope Felder, *Race, Racism, and the Biblical Narratives* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002).



sanctioned the whole of the American slave system – were not prepared to let a bare reading of the Bible overcome centuries of inherited race prejudice.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, it has been demonstrated that the sociological power of theologically under-girded assumptions of racial superiority, as well as approaches to Scripture and theology under-girded by unexamined assumptions of racial superiority, persisted into the Jim Crow period; and it may be argued that such theological assumptions and approaches continue to exert subtle, sometimes unconscious influence upon the still largely segregated, “separate bowls of fruit” worship practices of many American Christians across lines of race and ethnicity to this day.<sup>28</sup>

Another contrasting theological perspective regarding what social-spiritual reality *ought to be* the Christian community’s earthly goal in regard to race, ethnicity, and culture under-girds the homogeneous unit principle. C. Peter Wagner argues for the guilt-free acceptance of *de facto* racial, ethnic, and cultural segregation in Christian worship and fellowship, not on the basis of racial superiority or shame (both of which Wagner rejects), but as a practical strategy for cross-cultural mission, church growth, and even social justice in society.<sup>29</sup> Bruce Fong rejects the homogeneous unit principle as an ethical strategy on biblical and theological grounds, arguing for a “one new humanity”<sup>30</sup> social-spiritual reality based on Ephesians 2:11-22.

A basic provision which results from the redemptive work of Christ is the union of both Jewish (Hebraic) and Gentile (Hellenistic) ideas and people into a single Christian church. This international blend of two formerly distinct groups that

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<sup>27</sup> Noll, 74.

<sup>28</sup> Emerson, 48-49; the implications of Emerson’s work will be examined further in chapters 3-4; see also, Cain Hope Felder, ed., *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991).

<sup>29</sup> Peter C. Wagner, *Our Kind of People: The Ethical Dimensions of Church Growth in America* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979). See below, chapter 4, for further analysis of the homogeneous unit principle as it relates to ministry models and strategies for racial reconciliation.

<sup>30</sup> See discussion below of the “new social reality in Paul” as a biblical principle under-girding the thesis.

once thrived on mutual animosity against each other, demonstrates the divine intent to formulate a church comprised of a single people. Such singleness is not accomplished by ignoring or depleting cultural, ethnic or other social distinctives. Those features still exist and remain as an important part of the Christian's life. Instead, these two groups now share something in common with each other that surpasses their differences. This common item is something new brought about and made possible by the grace of God.<sup>31</sup>

It does not appear that Wagner and Fong directly utilize the heavenly vision of multiethnic worship in their respective arguments. However, the practical outworking of Wagner's theological perspective would suggest a "separate (albeit interdependent) bowls of racial, ethnic, and cultural fruit" social-spiritual reality as an accepted and preferred earthly ideal whatever heavenly reality may look like. Fong's "mutual acceptance" approach seems more to resemble the "fruit salad" approach of this thesis, in which cultural and other differences are not "ignored or depleted," yet something new is created by God and experienced together.

A caveat regarding cultural expression was mentioned previously regarding this Revelation 5:9 inspired spiritual-social reality in which Christians together express their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities without shame and without superiority. Although this heavenly vision allows for and guides a spiritual-social reality in which persons and communities express their cultural identities without shame, it does not allow for a descent into unbridled, "anything goes" cultural relativism, in which any particular expression of culture becomes an idol above or apart from Christ. The various cultural expressions of worship around the throne are all under the Lordship of Christ. As previously mentioned, there is only one Christ portrayed, not several. There can only be one "Top Chef" who creates, redeems, and ultimately enjoys the fruit salad for the divine

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<sup>31</sup> Bruce Fong, *Racial Equality in the Church: A Critique of the Homogeneous Unit Principle in Light of a Practical Theology Perspective* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1996), 71.

pleasure. Thus, Christ transcends all cultural expressions; the vision does not allow for any cultural expression to transcend the enthroned Christ.

While persons' and communities' racial and ethnic identities are often directly, though not necessarily related to their expressions of culture; when a person or community becomes part of the new creation,<sup>32</sup> their racial and ethnic identity, and perhaps something of their cultural expressiveness, persists into eternity and is "non-transformable;" yet all outward expressions of culture in terms of values and behavior are by necessity open to transformation under the Lordship of Christ. This view of the Rev. 5:9 inspired social-spiritual reality that *ought to be* here on earth seeks essentially to adopt H. Richard Niebuhur's "Christ the transformer of culture" perspective while recognizing that the new creation God is bringing into being, by divine design and will, is of necessity multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural.<sup>33</sup> No cultural expression associated with any particular racial or ethnic group dominates the "worship bowl" of heaven (it is fruit salad, not apple salad); representatives of every racial and ethnic group are included by necessity; yet all cultures and subcultures are equally, interdependently, under the transforming Lordship of Christ. As Leslie Newbigin writes:

The gospel endorses an immensely wide diversity among human cultures, but it does not endorse a total relativism. . . The criteria for making judgements between the one and the other cannot arise from [merely] one culture. That is the familiar error of cultural imperialism. There can only be criteria if God has in fact shown us what his will is. He has done so in Christ. . . The content of the revelation in Christ, defined crucially by the twin events of cross and resurrection, provides a basis on which the great diversity of cultures can be welcomed and cherished and the claim of any one culture to dominance can be resisted.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> 2 Co. 5:17.

<sup>33</sup> H. Richard Niebuhur, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951).

<sup>34</sup> Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989), 197.

Piper's Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota articulates the implications of this spiritual-social reality that *ought to be* based on Revelation 5:9 as a corporate value posted on its website. "Against the rising spirit of indifference, alienation and hostility in our land we will embrace the supremacy of God's love to take new (and active) steps personally and corporately toward racial reconciliation (harmony), expressed visibly in our community and in our church." This corporate value and their definition of racial harmony reflects well both the intentional multiculturalism of the heavenly vision, as well as the concern that cultural relativism not become an idol that transcends Christ and violates the vision: "The intermingling of all that is biblical and Christ-centered within diverse cultures for the purpose of a fuller experience and expression of Christ in the church and in the world." One of their principles underlying this definition affirms, "This kind of discernment demands great humility and the willingness to critically assess our own culture in order to be willing and able to see the value in other cultures. We desire to be that kind of church."<sup>35</sup> In turn, as will be shown below, this "willingness to assess critically" one's own culture within a multi-cultural body of Christ enables persons and communities to repent toward a Revelation 5:9-reflective social reality whenever necessary.

A final observation is in order regarding the biblical principle of beginning with the heavenly vision of worship in mind. The spiritual-social reality in which persons and communities relate to one another, and express their varied racial, ethnic, and cultural identities with neither superiority nor shame under the Lordship of Christ – such a reality is prefigured in Jesus' use of Isaiah 56:7, and in the miracle of Pentecost. That the

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<sup>35</sup> Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, "A Vision for Racial Harmony," n.p. [cited 10 January 2007]. Online: <http://www.bbcmpls.org/racialharmony/rhvision>.

multiethnic character of the people of God is divinely valued and intentional is confirmed in these and other passages. By referring to Isaiah 56:7 in his cleansing of the temple, Jesus alludes to numerous Old Testament prophesies picturing the inclusion of “still others,” representatives of all the *ethnos*, along with Israel among the people of God.<sup>36</sup> As Schweizer says regarding Jesus’ citation in Mark 11:17, “At first we heard of Jesus’ teaching in parables and next of his clear teaching about the suffering of the Son of Man; now we hear something new: ‘for all peoples’ . . . Mark understands the cleansing of the temple to indicate the abolition in principle of an institution which was restricted entirely to Jews. As a place of prayer the temple should . . . be open to all [humankind].”<sup>37</sup> In this and many other ways Jesus pointed toward the divinely intentioned, vicariously accomplished *multiethnic* character of the heavenly vision of worship.

Since speech itself is a key element of culture, it is instructive that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church after Jesus’ resurrection should include distinctly discernable, different languages (cultural expressions), yet all harmonized, understandable, and synergized for the greater glory of one God. Many commentators see in Pentecost the reversal of Babel’s effect.<sup>38</sup> Kidner associates Babel with Babylon and also sees in the greater vision of heavenly worship in Revelation the redemptive reversal of the idolatry expressed in Babel’s attempt to raise a cultural expression that transcended (reached even higher) than God.

One of its [Babylon’s] glories was its huge ziggurat, a temple-crowned artificial mountain whose name, Etemenanke, suggested the linking of heaven and earth.

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<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, Gn. 12:3; Is. 60:3-11.

<sup>37</sup> Eduard Schweizer, tr. Donald H. Madvig, *The Good News According to Mark* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1970), 233.

<sup>38</sup> Gen. 11:1-9; see, for instance, F. F. Bruce, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* (D. Guthrie et al, eds.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 975; and Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction & Commentary* in Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (D. J. Wiseman, gen. ed.; Leicester, England: Intervarsity, 1967), Vol. 1, 110.

But it was her sins that ‘reached . . . unto heaven’ (Rev. 18:5). In Revelation she is contrasted with the holy city which comes ‘down out of heaven’, whose open gates unite the nations (Rev. 21:10, 24-27).<sup>39</sup>

Whether the Pentecost worshippers are seen as Gentiles, or as Jews from different locales, this Babel-reversing experience still prefigures the divinely intentioned, resurrection empowered, unified yet *multicultural* character of the heavenly vision of worship.

Thus, the theological assumption that racial reconciliation with justice is part and parcel of the new life God loves to rekindle in his people is supported first by the biblical principle of the costly, divinely intentioned, multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural nature of the heavenly vision of worship. A second biblical principle supporting the assumption is the Apostle Paul’s insistence that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus precipitate a new social arrangement and status among Gentile and Jew.

#### A New Social Status in Community Transcending Race

Walter Kaiser identifies the events surrounding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Jerusalem, later in Samaria and Caesarea, and Paul’s first missionary journey into Europe as genuine biblical revivals.<sup>40</sup> In some ways, Paul’s epistles can be seen as contemporary theological and pastoral commentaries on these revivals. In the same way Kaiser sees the evangelism and missionary activity described in these passages as outgrowths of the reviving work of God, worthy to be pursued by God’s revived people of today; one also might see the new social realities Paul encouraged in light of Christ’s atoning work, as also being worthy of holy pursuit by God’s revived people of today.

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<sup>39</sup> Kidner, 111.

<sup>40</sup> Kaiser, 219.

Paul saw racial reconciliation with justice among God's people as part and parcel of the reviving work of God spreading from Jerusalem and across Asia Minor. Evidence of this can be seen in Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. He speaks readily in these epistles, in both his theological and ethical sections, regarding a new theological reality with social implications, among Gentile and Jew (a racial distinction, as well as an ethnic and cultural one), as well as among male and female, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free.<sup>41</sup> As Kaiser says concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles, and the Jews' reaction to this event in Acts 10, "God was indicating that these non-Jews should also be regarded not only as believers but even as full participants in the gift of the Holy Spirit. There were to be no second-class citizens in this fellowship."<sup>42</sup>

What Paul saw as the second-class treatment of Gentile believers in a specific social setting provides the occasion for his writing his epistle to the Galatians. The fact that Paul was unmistakably opposed to continuing to segment Gentile and Jewish believers in Christ in practical, every-day social settings can be seen in his calling Peter to task for refusing to eat with Gentiles and holding himself aloof.<sup>43</sup> For Paul, natural social implications attached to the theological reality of the Gentiles' inclusion in the redeeming work of the resurrected Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. To violate the social implications was to deny the theology. For Paul, you could not have one without the other.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ga. 3:23; Ep. 2:11-22; Col. 3:11.

<sup>42</sup> Kaiser, 216.

<sup>43</sup> Ga. 3:12.

<sup>44</sup> See Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Church in Galatia*, in *Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Helmut Kuster et al, eds., Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 190, for instance, on the social implications of Galatians 3:28.

Paul includes the slave-free distinction in his list of human distinctions that take on new characteristics in the realm of Christ. The way he saw this social reality as transformed “in Christ” can provide an analogy to how he viewed the other distinctions mentioned, including racial ones. Systematic theologian and ethicist Manfred Marquardt observes that many passages in Paul as well as in the rest of the Old and New Testaments assume the institution of slavery’s existence as a given and this has affected the church’s historical application of Pauline social ethics. “The church has repeatedly appealed to such passages to justify its renunciation of social change. Religious and secular freedom, religious and secular justice, have always been regarded as independent and non-mediated entities.”<sup>45</sup> Carrying such thinking forward, it could be argued for contemporary ethics, since Paul accepted the institution of slavery in his day and did not insist that the theological reality of slaves’ inclusion in Christ necessitated any earthly changes in social realities, surely racial segregation and any unfortunate indignity associated with it in the body of Christ and in society of today is not necessarily proscribed by the reviving work of the resurrected Christ.<sup>46</sup> This argument is inadequate for two reasons. First, it is an argument from silence, which is a weak form of argument. Second, in fact, Paul is not silent regarding the social implications attaching to the reviving work of the Christ who included both slave and free in his redemptive circle. As Marquardt also points out, “The Pauline refusal to derive slavery from the will of God has played no role in church history down to modern times.”

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<sup>45</sup> Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley’s Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles*, trans. John E. Steely and W. Stephen Gunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 69.

<sup>46</sup> See below, chapter 3; as will be shown this was precisely the view held by Anglican leaders in early 18<sup>th</sup> century England, which view John Wesley would soundly reject. However, some Methodists embraced this reasoning in supporting slavery in 19<sup>th</sup> century America, as well as enforced or *de facto* racial segregation on into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



A reexamination of the book of Philemon suggests perhaps it should. As one contemporary exegete of the little book observes,

I believe that African American people who study the Bible and who are concerned with issues of human freedom and liberation can take heart from Paul. Careful examination of his language shows that his ambiguity may not be so much a matter of his indecision as his unwillingness to canonize the social roles found in his environment. Rather, he invites the black church into new, non-static social configurations. And that, it seems to me, is where the storm clouds begin to part.<sup>47</sup>

Philemon provides a quintessential snapshot of Paul's vision regarding the social implications of the radically transforming, redemptive work of Jesus in the nitty-gritty of real life. Indeed, Paul veritably insists that the redemptive, resurrecting work of Christ in which Philemon and the slave Onesimus share, demands that Philemon treat Onesimus in a new way – as himself, Paul, no longer a slave. No second class citizens in the Body of Christ!

Although the letter is framed in the language of polite request, verse eight makes it clear that this is no optional, lackadaisical matter; for Paul, no other action is possible for Philemon in light of the redemptive work of Jesus. In fact, Paul may be hinting that should Philemon refuse, Philemon would be opting out of, and squelching the ongoing, mutually refreshing work of Christ.<sup>48</sup> One may ask the questions: Why was this tiny, perhaps seemingly insignificant letter discerned as being part of the inspired canon of Christian Scriptures? Was it not in order to trumpet to believers of all times this “quintessential snapshot of Paul's vision regarding the social implications of the radically transforming, redemptive work of Jesus,” in the nitty-gritty of real life, as a social reality they should expect and insist upon and work toward till the day Christ returns? Because

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<sup>47</sup> Lloyd A. Lewis, “An African American Appraisal of the Philemon-Paul-Onesimus Triangle,” Cain Hope Felder, ed., *Stony the Road We Trod*, 246.

<sup>48</sup> Philemon 7, 20.

of Paul's close association of the slavery and racial issues in the context of Galatians 3:28, Philemon is one of the best, real-life examples in Scripture of the social implications of Pauline theology. Perhaps Betz's claim that "There can be no doubt that Paul's statements have social and political implications of even a revolutionary dimension," seems extreme. Yet the biblical principle of a new, radically equalized social reality among the multi-racial body of Christ is clear, and strongly under-girds the theological assumption that racial reconciliation with justice is part and parcel of the new life a resurrecting God longs to rekindle among his people.

#### Jesus' Attitude toward the Poor and Marginalized

Jesus' attitude toward the poor and marginalized of his society provides further support for the theological assumption that racial reconciliation is part and parcel of the new life God longs to rekindle among his people. Racial reconciliation with justice should be part and parcel of genuine revival because justice toward the poor and marginalized was part and parcel of the kingdom Jesus proclaimed and the salvation he wrought in cross and resurrection. Any discussion of race in twenty-first century America must be animated by the fact that whether in church circles or in society at large, African Americans and some other racial/ethnic groups are poor in disproportional numbers, as compared with European Americans.<sup>49</sup>

Emerson and Smith cite statistics analyzed by Oliver and Shapiro in the mid-1990s regarding measures of both income and wealth. It may be assumed that the comparative realities they illustrate persist into the beginning part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. "Their research finds stunning disparities in wealth between blacks and whites, disparities

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<sup>49</sup> Because of the nature of this case study, it will focus primarily on racial attitudes and relations among Americans of African and European descent.

that remain vast even when accounting for differences in education, occupation, parent's occupation, income, family type, and other factors."<sup>50</sup> Emerson and Smith go on to observe that while Americans of African and European descent tend to view racial economic inequality differently in important ways, whether or not they are active church members; the vast majority do not see this disparity as resulting from inherent deficiencies in African American people.<sup>51</sup> The authors' explanations for this racial economic inequality and the "racialization" of America and models by which churches may respond positively (as opposed to helping perpetuate this reality) will be examined in chapter 4. However, the statistics they cite point clearly to a long-standing, apparently persistent inequality.

Using unique data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation, they measure household wealth in two ways: (1) as net worth, which is all assets minus all debts, and (2) net financial assets, which is net worth minus equity accrued in a home or vehicle. What did they find? The median net worth of blacks is just 8 percent of that of whites—3,700 dollars compared to 43,800 dollars—and the median net financial assets, shockingly, is 0 percent of that of whites—zero dollars compared to 7,000 dollars. Shifting their focus just to middle-class Americans, Oliver and Shapiro demonstrate the very shaky footing of the black middle class. For example, median net financial assets for college-educated whites are nearly 20,000 dollars; for college educated blacks, just 175 dollars. Without an asset pillar to stand on, the black middle class relies almost exclusively on income and job security. As the authors discovered in interviews with white and black Americans, a downturn in the economy or a change in marital status quickly sends significant numbers of the black middle class into lower classes. Whites, with their far superior assets, are able to survive such disruptions with little overall class-status change. In this case, it is true that when white America gets a cold, black America gets pneumonia.<sup>52</sup>

Therefore, any discussion of racial reconciliation in twenty-first century America in a biblical context cannot be separated from issues of justice and mercy toward the poor and

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<sup>50</sup> Emerson, 13.

<sup>51</sup> Emerson, 11-19, 93-114.

<sup>52</sup> Emerson, 13, citing Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 94-95.

marginalized. This is not to suggest that most African Americans are poor – in fact, they are not – but it is to suggest a necessary linkage in 21<sup>st</sup> century America between issues racial reconciliation and economic social justice. On this subject Jesus was far from silent in word and deed.

Jesus directly revealed his attitude regarding racial reconciliation and justice in the way he treated Samaritans and Gentiles. Again, though the distinction between Jesus, a Jew, and Samaritans and Gentiles of his day was ethnic and religious as well as racial, the racial distinction was a reality. Jesus defied the prevailing norms and customs of his day regarding race relations in the way he spoke to, and about, Samaritans and Gentiles.<sup>53</sup>

However, more importantly, Jesus also proclaimed and demonstrated in his behavior a kingdom in which the literally poor and marginalized were specifically and intentionally included. In their *Jesus and the Hope of the Poor*,<sup>54</sup> Schottroff and Stegemann explore this aspect of Jesus' ministry and its implications. Various theologies may debate the place and priority this aspect of Jesus' ministry should be given.<sup>55</sup> However, any serious student of Jesus' life and ministry as revealed in the Scriptures cannot deny that good news for the (literally) poor, including an eschatological restoration of social justice and mercy, was part and parcel of the kingdom Jesus proclaimed.

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<sup>53</sup> Matthew 8:5-13; 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30; Luke 4:25-27; 7:1-10; 10:25-37; John 4:4-42, 46-54; and perhaps Matthew 22:2-14; Luke 13:28-29; 14:15-24.

<sup>54</sup> Luise Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann, *Jesus and the Hope of the Poor*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1986).

<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury, 1975), 72-81; or David P. Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts*, ed. A. Fuchs (Linz, Austria: Studien zum Nuen Testament und Siener Umwelt, 1983), 95, endnote 5, who notes "that approximately 27% of the 600 odd verses of teaching material in Luke 3-22" speak of the concern for possessions and the poor, yet concludes "There is nothing socio-economic or socio-religious about Luke's use of 'poor' terminology" in Luke 1-7."

The title of Schottroff and Stegemann's third chapter reveals their view of Luke's social message: "The Following of Christ as Solidarity between Rich, Respected Christians and Poor, Despised Christians." The title alone itself could be seen as fruitful soil for understanding a proper relationship between revival and racial reconciliation with justice. One could imagine a concept arising, "the experience of revival as solidarity between rich, respected Christians and poor, despised Christians." If the experience of following Christ included such solidarity, surely the experience of being revived by Christ would include its renewal to the extent it had been abandoned or was not being experienced. To understand why such a concept is so right and biblical, one need only assert the opposite concept (which is a self-evident oxymoron), "the experience of revival *without* solidarity between rich, respected Christians and poor, despised Christians," and simply imagine the pain on Jesus' face.

While not denying Jesus' and Luke's proclamation of an eschatological social reversal,<sup>56</sup> Schottroff and Stegemann (rightly) argue, however, that this does not exclude the non-poor or non-marginalized from participation in the kingdom (and thus for our purposes, revival). Immediately following the beatitude of the poor and the parallel woe-saying on the rich, for instance, there follow instructions on how non-poor and non-marginalized persons can participate positively in the social reversal just proclaimed.<sup>57</sup> They do so through joining in a restoration of, and even going beyond, the social justice and mercy ideals articulated in *Torah*, which were specifically designed to protect and

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<sup>56</sup> See, for instance, Lk. 1:52-53; 3:5; 4:18; 6:20-26; 9:46-48; 14:11; 22:24-27.

<sup>57</sup> Lk. 6:20-26, 28-38.

include the poor and marginalized in society,<sup>58</sup> and were often vigorously reaffirmed in the Writings and the Prophets.<sup>59</sup>

The personal revival experienced by Zacchaeus is particularly instructive.<sup>60</sup> Here is an interesting human specimen in the context of this study: one who was rich, yet probably socially marginalized. While his salvation is not earned, he positively participates in it immediately by accepting an opportunity to play host to Jesus, becoming merciful to the poor, repenting of past injustice toward them, and receiving the restoration of his standing with God and within his social community through the dignified designation, son of Abraham. He becomes a prototype for all rich persons who would receive the gift of salvation, or experience subsequent revival. Though his reception of Jesus' proclamation of salvation is preceded by his participation in the restoration of social justice toward the poor in the narrative, it probably is best understood not too narrowly as either condition or effect of the salvation, but rather as part and parcel of it. In other words, his participation in social justice toward the poor was not merely an optional result of his salvation he could have chosen or chosen not to exercise. Rather, the ability and immediate impetus to do so was a necessary aspect of the gift he received. According to I. Howard Marshall, "Zacchaeus for his part responds with joy, and also by promising to use his wealth, honestly and ill-gotten, to help the poor and to make restitution for his former evil habits; in this way the meaning of discipleship,

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<sup>58</sup> Exodus 23:6-9; Leviticus 14:21; 19:15, 34; 25:25-28, 35-43; Deuteronomy 10:18-19; 15:1-11; 16:19-20.

<sup>59</sup> I Samuel 2:4-10; Psalm 76:9; 103:6; 146:7-9; Isaiah 1:17; 3:14-15; 5:7-8; 58:6-7; 59:15-16; Jeremiah 9:24; 22:2-3, 15-16; Amos 5:15, 21-24; 8:4-6; Micah 2:1-5; 6:6-8.

<sup>60</sup> Luke 19:1-10.

especially in regard to wealth, is clearly expressed.”<sup>61</sup> Similarly, as a socially marginalized person, he immediately received the gift of a new social status in the faith community. This new social reality proclaimed by Jesus is not seen as comprising the whole of the salvation Zacchaeus received, but it was a necessary and real component of the “lostness” Jesus’ salvation had just reversed.<sup>62</sup>

In any case, if indeed Zacchaeus functions for Luke as a type for how either the rich or the marginalized participate in the kingdom Jesus proclaimed and the salvation he offered, it has tremendous implications for present day expectations regarding revival and spiritual renewal. If revival is genuine, clearly, it will include necessarily (though surely not be limited to) a restoration of biblical justice toward the poor and marginalized to the extent that participants in the revival have abandoned such ideals or have yet to experience them.<sup>63</sup> Assuming race, poverty, and social marginalization are interconnected realities in a given church and society context, the relationship between revival and racial reconciliation with justice is well established. Jesus’ attitudes and actions provide further support for the assumption that racial reconciliation with justice is to be a necessary and expected component of genuine revival.

### Justice and Reconciliation Inseparable

A further nuance of this assumption relates to the way in which Jesus’ attitude toward the poor and marginalized was rooted in Old Testament concepts of justice, mercy, holiness,

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<sup>61</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, eds; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 694.

<sup>62</sup> Lk. 19:9-10

<sup>63</sup> Also, see Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 105-106, who relates the necessary connection among social justice, the in-breaking reign of God, and personal salvation.

and love.<sup>64</sup> The use of the phrase, “racial reconciliation with justice,” is intentional. The assumption is that racial reconciliation apart from justice is no reconciliation at all, in the same way that peace, in a biblical sense, is not *shalom*, apart from biblical justice. As the prophet Jeremiah lamented:

They are fat, they are sleek,  
They also excel in deeds of wickedness;  
They do not plead the cause,  
The cause of the orphan, that they may prosper;  
And they do not defend the rights of the poor . . .  
For from the least of them even to the greatest of them,  
Everyone is greedy for gain,  
And from the prophet even to the priest  
Everyone deals falsely.  
And they have *healed the brokenness of my people superficially*,  
Saying, ‘Peace, peace,’  
But there is no peace.<sup>65</sup>

As Bonhoeffer wrote, “There can only be a community of peace when it does not rest on lies and *injustice*.”<sup>66</sup> To seek racial reconciliation while denying the need to bring the Gospel to bear on racial injustice is to risk a misguided attempt to “heal the brokenness of God’s people superficially.”

Drawing an analogy between the divine-human relationship and the human-human relationship in the context of justice, mercy and reconciliation may be helpful here.<sup>67</sup> As Mott says, the command to love God and neighbor is not two commands of different priority, but one “double commandment of love.”<sup>68</sup> While the glorious mystery of how God expresses perfect justice and mercy in love through cross and resurrection

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. Micah 6:8; Mt. 23:23; Lk. 11:42.

<sup>65</sup> Jer. 5:28; 6:13-14; cf. 8:11; Ezekiel 13:10.

<sup>66</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “On the Theological Basis of the Work of the World Alliance,” in Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Buron Nelson, eds., *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, rev. (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 101; note also how the editors observe the growing association in Bonhoeffer’s mind between America’s and Germany’s struggle with racial justice in the 1930s, 10-11.

<sup>67</sup> Lk. 11:25-37.

<sup>68</sup> Mott, 126.



surely is not explainable exhaustively; the point being made here is that justice and reconciliation are a perfectly and beautifully balanced singularity in his saving work. In Pauline theology, it is especially clear, that the merciful invitation to reconciliation with God is predicated on the righteousness-satisfying justification accomplished on the cross. According to Protestant, and particularly Wesleyan understandings, justification precedes yet persists inseparably with sanctification. In the divine-human saving experience of the benefits of atonement, justification precedes or begins the unfolding experience of peace, reconciliation, and sanctification<sup>69</sup> In other words, there is no reconciliation prior to or apart from justification (i.e. fulfilling the ‘just requirements of the law’). Justice and reconciliation, saturated in the absolute holiness and love of God, are intricately and inseparably linked in the gift of salvation – not “two realities of different priority,” but “one double reality of love.” In the same way that postulating a divine-human reconciliation apart from justification would be theological anathema within the biblical scheme, so too would any human-human racial reconciliation prior to or entirely divorced from resolving issues of social justice, in a biblical sense, be a theological absurdity. In other words, to speak of racial reconciliation in a biblical, Jesus-centered context is to speak of reconciliation with an inherent and ongoing concern for justice, including economic justice.<sup>70</sup>

### **Repentance as Necessary Precursor**

Thus far it has been established that an ongoing desire to revive the people of God exists deep within the heart of the Trinity, deep within the character of a resurrecting God.

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<sup>69</sup> Ro. 5,1,11; 2 Co. 5:19-21; see Harald Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 83-84, 113-114.

<sup>70</sup> See John Perkins, *With Justice for All* (Ventura: Regal, 1982), 146-189; notice how in his strategy for racial justice “redistribution” immediately and logically follows upon “reconciliation.”

Also, the fact that racial justice and reconciliation are part and parcel of the revival God desires has been under-girded by three biblical principles: the multi-racial vision of heavenly worship in Revelation, the new social reality expounded in Paul, and Jesus' concern with justice for the oppressed in community. Finally, a third theological assumption supports a practical theology of spiritual renewal through repentance and racial reconciliation. This assumption is that biblical repentance is both a necessary precursor and an ongoing element in the experience of concomitant spiritual renewal and racial reconciliation. Four observations and a practical implication accompany this assumption regarding repentance and racial reconciliation. The observations include the facts that repentance is: forwardly focused on tangible changes in specific attitudes and actions, as opposed to becoming stuck in vague remorse or guilt feelings unassociated with meaningful change; always deeply personal yet also both individual and corporate in nature; a moving away from both present sins as well as the lingering effects of past sinful structures, and finally; a moving away from changeable attitudes and actions, not unchanging racial and ethnic identities. The implication of these observations is the adoption of a humble, sensitive yet truth-telling "baby/bathwater" approach to dealing with matters of race, ethnicity, and culture within the Christian community.

After thirty years of studying movements of genuine spiritual renewal spanning all eras of church history, among Christian communities with diverse denominational, racial, ethnic, and cultural identities; Dr. Garth Rosell of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary has concluded three elements seem to be present in all of them. These three elements are believing, united prayer; faithful obedience to the proclamation of Scripture; and a deep experience of repentance, "falling on our face before a holy God." While he

cautions that spiritual renewal itself and seasons of revival are God's work under God's timing, and that Christians cannot design or implement this experience; spiritual renewal seems to be a regular gift offered from heaven to God's people, and it can be prepared for by engaging in the three elements. He identifies repentance as the "starting point."<sup>71</sup>

### Repentance: Forwardly Focused

The concept of *metanoia* in the New Testament carries forward the Old Testament experience of a change of mind or heart. While biblical repentance includes an emotional element of remorse and regret over past attitudes and actions, it primarily emphasizes the turning away from previous attitudes and actions to new attitudes and actions. The turning itself is the locus of the word's meaning. Remorse or regret is not the intended focus of repentance, though it may initially accompany it. A divinely enabled new heart and life is the focus. When the prophet Joel said, "Rend your heart and not your garments," he was not advocating a repentance *confined* to the heart, he was reacting against merely symbolic outward actions of remorse unrelated to a God-enabled, God-directed new congruence of heart and life.<sup>72</sup> In response to John the Baptist's preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, listeners essentially said, "What's the bottom line, what should we do?" John, though mincing no words, did not instruct them to self-flagellate, literally or spiritually, but instead replied, "Bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance," and then told them immediately to engage in specific acts of justice and mercy.<sup>73</sup> "A baptism of [repentance to] conversion signifies that God is at work to change our nature for the new aeon. God himself grants [repentance to] conversion as

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<sup>71</sup> From my notes of a classroom lecture given by Dr. Rosell at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina, 08 January 2001.

<sup>72</sup> Joel 2:12-13.

<sup>73</sup> Lk. 3:3-14.

both gift and task; it is for us to let it be given and to authenticate it as the divine basis of a new being.”<sup>74</sup> Thus repentance, even if it issues forth in restitution for past wrongdoing, is the close ally of restorative justice as opposed to retributive justice in the outworking of racial reconciliation.<sup>75</sup> Repentance examines the past bravely, unflinchingly, not easily glossing over anything or denying the evil of any sin, yet it never gets stuck therein. It is a divinely enabled experience that always propels Christians forward in the new creation.

### Repentance: Individual, Personal, and Corporate

Nevertheless, repentance is a matter of the heart, deeply personal, and experienced in both individual and corporate dimensions. In discussing Revival under Hezekiah<sup>76</sup> Kaiser notes the need for a repentance that is corporate in nature and goes beyond individual sins:

Too frequently we have learned to pray only for ourselves, our families, and those closest to us, much on the order of the individualistic American who believes in looking out for number one. But who will pray for the larger groups if we do not? And how can we disassociate ourselves from the sin of the group? Is it not, as Daniel prayed, our sin and our confusion that have grieved God? We should learn to pray more in a corporate mode, as well as a personal mode, of confession of our own sin.<sup>77</sup>

Because the sins of racial hatred and injustice in the church and in society are often corporate in nature, unconscious and systemic, and not confined to individuals as individuals, some form of both individual and corporate repentance, public and private, would seem to be a crucial element in any revival-borne racial reconciliation.

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<sup>74</sup> Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, tr. Geoffrey W. Bromily, abridged in 1 vol. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 642.

<sup>75</sup> Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York, Image Doubleday, 1999), 54-55.

<sup>76</sup> 2 Chronicles 30:1-9

<sup>77</sup> Kaiser, 126-27.

### Repentance: Away from Past Sinful Structures

A third observation needs to be made regarding the assumption that repentance is a necessary precursor and ongoing element in the experience of concomitant spiritual renewal and racial reconciliation. Not only is this necessary repentance assumed to be individual and corporate in nature, it also may need to include the turning away from the lingering effects of past attitudes and actions not committed specifically by the present community (“it’s not my fault”). While the trajectory of repentance is always forward into the new creation, some public, heartfelt recognition of past communal failure, even if such failure was committed by forbears in ignorance – such heartfelt public recognition to God and within the greater community can be incredibly healing. The focus is not at all on condemning forbears; it is on publicly and corporately disassociating ourselves from specific behaviors and attitudes now known to be sinful and displeasing to God, and demonstrating a new congruence of heart and life in adopting new behaviors and attitudes. In revival experienced under Nehemiah and Ezra, following a long period of spiritual ignorance, when the people heard God’s word and became aware suddenly of the lingering effects of the striking incongruence between God’s desires and their forbears’ and their own hearts and lives, they began to weep and wail. And yet because their hearts were in the right place and they were determined to live the right way with their new knowledge and empowerment, Nehemiah invited them to rejoice – not because their previous sinful behavior was not that bad or offensive to God’s holiness, but because this holy, loving, endlessly restorative God was creating a new day in their lives, publicly and privately, personally and communally.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Nehemiah 8:1-12; see Kaiser, 159-71.

Thus at a recent United Methodist General Conference, a bishop of one of the African American Methodist denominations responded publicly to a formal “Act of Repentance” for historic and ongoing racism within the Methodist family, saying quite appropriately, in the spirit of John the Baptist, “We accept your repentance, and we also will be ‘fruit inspectors.’ ” Such a reply reflected a beautiful understanding of repentance, both acknowledging the wrongness of past attitudes and actions without condemning persons, while affirming in participatory hope the God-given possibilities for actually living out new, specific, verifiable attitudes and actions “in keeping with repentance.”

#### Repentance: Not Away from Racial and Ethnic Identity

A fourth observation regarding the place of repentance in the experience of racial reconciliation with justice is in order. It relates to the spiritual-social reality described above, in which persons find the freedom in community to express their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities with neither shame nor superiority under the Lordship of Christ. Persons in the biblical context are never asked to express shame or remorse for their racial identity. Persons or communities are not required to repent of their unchangeable racial or ethnic identities. To do so would be to disavow or disrespect something divinely intentioned and infinitely valuable according to the heavenly vision. Biblical repentance always involves the identification of specific, transformable attitudes and actions persons move away from and new attitudes and actions they embrace.

While Wesley and others include in their daily prayers an expression of remorse and utter need relating to the sinful aspects of their universal human condition, never are persons invited to express shame or remorse or repentance regarding their racial or ethnic

condition.<sup>79</sup> Paul urged both Jews and Gentiles to give up specific behaviors, sometimes associated with culture and clearly demonstrated to be un-Christ-like; yet he never enjoined repentance upon Jews for being Jews or Gentiles for being Gentiles.<sup>80</sup> Though it appears that Jesus almost condemned a woman simply for her racial identity and heritage, he ends up praising her faith. In his encounter with the woman at the well, he refuses to shame her for her ethnic or even her religious identity and includes her insightfully in the spread of his good news, just as he did for people of varying racial, ethnic and cultural identities.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, for instance, whereas a person may become aware of the concept of “white privilege” and how he or she may be receiving unjust societal benefits in a systemic way,<sup>82</sup> and then repent of an attitude of unconscious superiority in thinking that he or she somehow deserved these benefits over other persons; this is subtly yet clearly distinct from shame over one’s racial or ethnic identity and heritage. This is not *repenting* from *being* white. In contexts where past and ongoing racial injustice and insensitivity are present, as in the case at hand, it is important that persons be given meaningful opportunities to repent away, not from general racial, ethnic, or even cultural identities, but rather away from specific attitudes and actions and toward new specific attitudes and actions. A misguided, so-called repentance in which persons or communities get stuck in vague but persistent shame over their racial, ethnic or cultural heritage is just as

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<sup>79</sup> John Wesley, “A Collection of Forms of Prayer,” *The Works of John Wesley* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; rpt. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), XI, 203-37.

<sup>80</sup> Gal. 2:11-14; 1 Co. 5:1; 12:2; Eph. 4:17; 1 Th. 4:5.

<sup>81</sup> Mk. 7:24-30; Jn. 4:4-42.

<sup>82</sup> Louise Derman-Sparks and Carol Brunson Phillips, *Teaching/Learning Anti-Racism: A Developmental Approach* (NY: Teachers College Press, 1997), 88-90.

antithetical to racial justice and reconciliation as persons being locked into ignorant, blissful expressions of racial superiority.

Specifically, in the American racial context, feelings of vague, persistent guilt for being white that do not issue forth in new attitudes and actions unfortunately are hauntingly parallel to vague, persistent feelings of shameful inferiority experienced by African Americans described as having unconsciously “internalized racism.”<sup>83</sup> Such feelings unattached to tangible, positive change do nothing to help usher in God’s new reality in which persons feel neither shame nor superiority regarding their racial, ethnic, and cultural identity. Such pervasive feelings are not repentance and certainly not revival. For 21<sup>st</sup> century European American Christians a truth needs to be told. Expressions of guilt that do not issue forth in tangible changes in attitudes, actions, and societal structures – these expressions should not be confused with biblical repentance.

Joseph Barndt helpfully has likened racism in all its forms and effects, including its shame, to a prison that punishes Americans of all races, specifically including European Americans in spite of grossly unfair advantages they may derive from its outworkings. Repentance doesn’t merely complain and feel ashamed of the prison. It moves toward tearing it down and building something new.<sup>84</sup> As chapters three through five will show, however, moving through repentance to systemic societal (or even congregational) change is extremely challenging. Yet recall the thought pondered centuries ago by a marginalized young woman -- on behalf of all marginalized people and

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<sup>83</sup> “Internalized Racism,” (Seattle: The International Re-Evaluation Counseling Communities, 2001-2006), [www.rc.org/uer/InternalizedRacism](http://www.rc.org/uer/InternalizedRacism).

<sup>84</sup> Joseph Barndt, *Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991), 45.



peoples--a young woman who would bear within her being the seed of the resurrected One, and the very possibility of a whole new world.<sup>85</sup>

### Repentance: A Practical Implication

These observations regarding the crucial role of biblical repentance within the experience of concomitant spiritual renewal and racial reconciliation suggest a practical implication.

The implication is also consistent with the heavenly worship vision, Paul's new social reality, and Jesus' embodiment of justice and mercy. This would be the adoption of a humble, sensitive, truth-telling "baby/bathwater" approach to dealing with matters of race, ethnicity and culture within the Christian community. The American folk proverb, "Don't throw out the baby with the bathwater," seems particularly instructive in this context. When it comes to repentance, identifying specific attitudes, actions, and social structures to "throw out" and move away from is a crucial enterprise. At the same time, identifying that which is unchangeable, divinely intentioned, and reflective of the divine image, therefore infinitely valued – what *not* to throw out, the "baby" part – this discernment is equally crucial.<sup>86</sup> As previously argued, since one's racial and ethnic identity is unchangeable and fixed by ancestry; persons, congregations and communities need to view these gifts as relating to the "baby" part of our beings, reflecting something of the divine image, never to be entirely discarded, never needing to be "cleansed."

However, related cultural practices, attitudes, and values are always in a state of flux.

The multiracial, multiethnic character of heaven and the human creation would suggest there are aspects of all human cultures consistent with the will of God and the Lordship

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<sup>85</sup> Lk. 1:37,46-55; 2:19, "Nothing will be impossible with God."; cf. Rev. 21:1,5. How difficult can it be for One who speaks universes into being and raises the dead to dismantle a measly little building and construct something new?

<sup>86</sup> 2 Co. 3:17-18.

of Christ. Did not God become incarnate within a specific culture as a means for divine self-disclosure? Yet at the same time, because of the universality of the fall and human sinfulness, it can also be assumed that there are practices, values and attitudes within *all* human cultures and subcultures that need to be transformed in the new creation. God both makes self-disclosure using human cultures, while at the same time standing in sovereign, redeeming judgment over all expressions of culture.

Recall Bethlehem Baptist's statements, which seem to have this very distinction in mind: "the intermingling of all that is biblical and Christ-centered within diverse cultures," and "This kind of discernment demands great humility and the willingness to assess critically our own culture in order to be willing and able to see the value in other cultures. We desire to be that kind of church."<sup>87</sup> Thus, anything in any culture making tangible the cross and resurrection—that is, sacrificial love and the sharing of resurrection power—is to be highly valued by all. This becomes the litmus test under which all cultures and cultural expressions can be evaluated, critically yet lovingly, by the intentionally multicultural body of Christ on earth. Therefore, with regard to matters of race, ethnicity, and related cultural expressions, from what should Christians repent and from what should they not repent? Answer: do not throw out the baby with the bathwater. Discerning the difference in some form of humble, mutually sensitive, mutually truth-telling, intentionally multi-cultural Christian community becomes not only a crucial contemporary *task*, but perhaps such a form also suggests a *means* faithfully so to discern. Chapter four will examine strategies and ministry models for how Asbury and other congregations might pursue such a means with wisdom.

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<sup>87</sup> Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, "A Vision for Racial Harmony," n.p. [cited 10 January 2007]. Online: <http://www.bbcmpls.org/racialharmony/rhvision>.

Again, though, repentance matters. Specific actions, attitudes, and social structures consistent with the previously described spiritual-social reality in which persons express their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities without shame and without superiority vis-a-vis one another, under the Lordship of the risen, multicultural community creating Christ – this is the focus of genuine, revival-anticipating, revival-borne repentance. Repentance, personal and communal, away from past and present inequities, for our forbears, ourselves, and our future, is a gift. Repentance always builds something new; and it is surprisingly, stunningly beautiful.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps**

A recent discovery of an unmarked African American cemetery formerly owned by a particular church, Asbury United Methodist Church in Smyrna, Delaware, has necessitated a formal response from this congregation. From what theological and biblical resources might this congregation, and the greater Christian community of Smyrna, draw in order to respond faithfully to issues involving past and present racial attitudes and race relations? This chapter has proposed the necessity of a practical, resurrection-based theology of spiritual renewal through repentance and racial reconciliation. It has been shown that such a practical theology rests upon three assumptions: a resurrecting God loves to revive his people; racial reconciliation is part and parcel of the new life God longs to rekindle, which assumption itself has been supported by three important biblical principles; and repentance is a necessary precursor and ongoing experience in concomitant racial reconciliation and spiritual renewal.

The first under-girding assumption that God loves to revive establishes the practicality and potentiality of applying a practical, resurrection-based theology of

spiritual renewal to virtually all cases confronting any congregation, including this case and this congregation. The second underlying assumption establishes the expectation that spiritual renewal and racial reconciliation with justice can and should be concomitants. Thus seeking spiritual renewal from a reviving, resurrecting God through means of intentional acts of racial reconciliation, and seeking such renewal in order to empower such acts is not unreasonable. Thus it is a practical, resurrection-based theology of spiritual renewal through racial reconciliation. Finally, the third assumption establishes the necessity of intentionally making repentance an initial and ongoing component in the response. Thus it is a practical, resurrection-based theology of spiritual renewal through repentance and racial reconciliation.

Examples of first-century Christians wrestling with such a theology in the nitty-gritty of life can be seen in how they dealt with such issues as disputes over serving meals to widows, and disagreements concerning circumcision.<sup>88</sup> How will the Asbury congregation live out this theology in the nitty-gritty of its cemetery response? Before examining the availability of practical, contemporary ministry models and strategies for carrying out the theology, and then assessing the congregation's actual response; the next chapter will look at strengths and vulnerabilities inherent in the larger Methodist history in light of the theology described, and apply insights gleaned to the present case.

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<sup>88</sup> Acts 6; 15.

## CHAPTER THREE HISTORICAL INSIGHTS: CLEANING OFF A GEM

*The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field . . .  
--Matthew 13:44*

### **Introduction**

The 2005 rediscovery of its historic African American cemetery has raised some practical theological questions regarding racial attitudes and race relations for a predominantly European-American congregation, Asbury United Methodist Church, Smyrna, Delaware. Chapter one described the local historical setting and chapter two established the biblical foundations and applicability of a practical, resurrection-based theology of spiritual renewal through repentance and racial reconciliation. Toward what new reality should they be repenting and what specific actions and ministry models might they utilize to get there? Chapter two sought to answer the former aspect of the question; chapter four will examine the latter. This chapter will assess Asbury's "historical-spiritual DNA" as part of the wider historic movement of Methodism, seeking strengths to recover and utilize, vulnerabilities of which to be aware, and clear injustices from which to repent. An analytical framework arising from chapter two will be applied to early Methodist history, looking primarily at John Wesley's writings and American Methodism as it developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Insights gleaned will be integrated into the analysis of various resources and ministry models in chapter four.

This chapter will argue that the primary strength to utilize and recover is to be found in John Wesley's holiness-driven spirituality and theology, and how this theology was embraced and lived out for a time among persons of varying cultural, ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds. A vulnerability of which to be aware was Methodism's tendency as a movement in America, not only to *affect positively* the wider culture in which it operated, but also increasingly the tendency to accommodate, and *be affected by* widely-held cultural values inconsistent with the gospel of cross and resurrection, as Methodism developed from a scattered spiritual movement to one of America's primary Protestant denominations. Using the "baby/bathwater" approach described in chapter two, this historical analysis provides Asbury with important spiritual insights regarding race-related attitudes and practices to abandon as "bathwater," and attitudes and practices to recover and nurture as "baby;" or to use another analogy, dirt to discard and a buried gem to rediscover.

### **John Wesley's Holiness-Driven Spirituality and Theology**

Inherent in John Wesley's theology and spirituality as it relates to race relations and racial attitudes lie insights worth recovering and utilizing in contemporary situations. This is evidenced in how his holiness-driven "one new humanity" spirituality was embraced by persons across the spectrum of social condition in the First Great Awakening, and in the way Wesley actively opposed social injustice in the greater society in his day, including the peculiar institution of race-based slavery.

Hempton perhaps best describes Wesley's theology as a "moving vortex, fueled by scripture and divine love, shaped by experience, reason, and tradition, and moving dynamically toward holiness or Christian perfection. Any model that lacks dynamic

movement toward holiness and its growth within individuals and its dissemination throughout the world is clearly inadequate.”<sup>1</sup> That persons and whole communities of varying social condition in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries felt included and enthusiastically participated in this “moving vortex,” with its inherent personal and social dimensions, has been well documented.<sup>2</sup> Henry Mitchell identifies three “tracers of cultural compatibility” between Christian spirituality at the time of the First Great Awakening on the one hand, and the “underground” cultural heritage and social reality of enslaved Africans in America on the other, as such reality developed into the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These tracers include parallels between African traditional religion and the Old Testament; Moses and Jesus as powerful liberators; and “more visible and easy to date, the impact of the commonality between the expressive culture of Africa and the unprecedented (for whites) free expressiveness and emotion of the First Great Awakening.”<sup>3</sup> Statistical evidence clearly indicates African Americans’ strong participation in the Methodist movement from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Of the twenty-seven African American congregations Mitchell highlights, whose foundings date from 1750-1800; fourteen of the twenty-seven are Methodist.<sup>4</sup> That this early African-American embrace of Methodist spirituality continues to some extent, and is relevant to the Smyrna, Delaware area of today can be seen in that as of 2005, of the 112 United Methodist congregations in a two-county area including Smyrna, nineteen, or seventeen percent are considered predominantly African-American in heritage as well as current membership.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University, 2005), 57.

<sup>2</sup> Note Hempton, 24-25, and the numerous sources and examples he cites.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings: The Long Hidden Realities of the First Years* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 33.

<sup>4</sup> Mitchell, 62-70.

<sup>5</sup> *Official Journal, Peninsula-Delaware Conference of the United Methodist Church, 221<sup>st</sup> Session* (Newark, DE: Workflow, 2005), 173-180.

Currently just over twenty percent of Delaware residents are African Americans, so if the numerous currently active AME congregations in the area also were counted in the mix, the percentage of African-American Methodist congregations relative to Methodism as a whole in the two county area is still higher than the general African-American population.

The theological thought and practice of John Wesley as it relates to racial justice and reconciliation can be seen, not only in how African Americans embraced Methodist spirituality, but also in his own personal dealings with African people, his response to slavery and the slave trade, and how this response helped shape the practice of other early Methodists. Slavery and the slave trade were well-established realities in eighteenth-century England and its colonies. The political and economic context in which Wesley and other revival leaders found themselves in the early eighteenth century was such that slavery and the slave trade seemed to be accepted without protest in most quarters of society,<sup>6</sup> despite its obvious inhumanity and injustice.

National interest in the slave trade had been heightened by royal privileges, parliamentary laws, international agreements, and above all, the *Asiento* clause of 1714, a part of the Utrecht peace accord guaranteeing England and Spain a monopoly on the slave trade. Consequently, a large part of the British population was receiving a profit from slave trading. . . It is inexcusable that king, cabinet, and Parliament did not oppose on behalf of foreigners the violation of fundamental rights guaranteed to their own citizens in the British constitution. England was rightly regarded as one of the states with the most extensive individual rights. However, the slavery situation must be understood altogether in terms of prevailing economic and political factors<sup>7</sup>

The response of the Anglican state church, for the most part, was to tolerate slavery.

Thus in 1727, Edmund Gibson, the bishop of London, who was also responsible for the

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<sup>6</sup> With notable exceptions, including Anglican Bishop Warburton and Quaker leaders such as George Fox, as cited by Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles*, trans. John E. Steely and W. Stephen Gunter, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 68, 70.

<sup>7</sup> Marquardt, 68.



colonies, wrote against the demand that Christianized slaves should be freed by their Christian owners: “The Freedom which Christianity gives is a Freedom from the bondage of Sin and Satan . . . but as to their outward Condition, whatever that was before . . . their being baptized, and becoming Christians, makes no manner of Change in it.”<sup>8</sup>

The Bishop used an understanding that Paul’s theological rationale demanded Christians should deliberately refrain from fundamentally altering the contemporary social structure. As will be argued later, Wesley deliberately rejected this view of Pauline social ethics in regard to slavery, as also is indicated by the practice of early Methodists under his care.

Wesley mentions his personal dealings with “Negroes” in several accounts in his journal, primarily before 1738, while he was a missionary in Georgia, but also after he returned to England.<sup>9</sup> Though he did not begin publicly protesting slavery and the effects of the slave trade until after 1770, and he was not converted (in the sense of personally experiencing justification by faith, which experience was to be an incredible boon to the coming revival) until 1738, his inner passion to live out a holy life before God and people was well established early in life. This inner passion worked itself out early and often in acts of mercy for the poor from Holy Club days on. Though he was rather ineffective as a missionary, he viewed and treated African Americans and Native Americans in the colonial period as persons of sacred worth, with immortal souls to be rescued because God created them for that end.

However, this social holiness was not limited to acts of mercy, with no regard for social justice. There is evidence that prior to 1738 (let alone 1770) his sense of biblical

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<sup>8</sup> Marquardt, 69.

<sup>9</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (1872; rpt. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1986), i. 49, ii. 337, 338, 354-356, 392, 433, 464.

justice was already violated at the plight of enslaved Africans and this carried through to his public protest of slavery in later years. In 1737, he wrote in his journal this comment about a certain place, in a context of describing his interaction with several slaves and a Native American:

O how hath God stretched over this place “the lines of confusion, and the stones of emptiness!” Alas for those whose lives were here vilely cast away, through oppression, through divers plagues and troubles! O earth! How long wilt thou hide their blood? How long wilt thou cover thy slain?<sup>10</sup>

Wesley was known for his generous sprinkling of biblical allusions and images through his written works, and was too serious a student of the Scriptures to be unaware of biblical context. In the above quotation he refers to Isaiah 34:11 and possibly Job 16:18, an appeal to God for justice. Though the connection of the 1737 quote to social justice with regard to race may be tentative, it is noteworthy that he uses a similar phrase, “O Earth, O Sea, cover not thou their blood,” in his “Thoughts upon Slavery,”<sup>11</sup> again a possible allusion to Job 16:18, this time in 1774 in an unmistakable context of social justice with regard to race.

Wesley’s assertion that “the African is in no respect inferior to the European”<sup>12</sup> was based on a combination of his biblical understanding of humanity, his personal experience of Africans, and his reading other literature about Africans. Nevertheless, Wesley did not publicly protest slavery as a lawful institution until after 1770 and particularly with his publication and widespread distribution of the tract, “Thoughts upon Slavery.” Wesley continued to advocate for the public abolition of slavery until his death, including writing a note of encouragement to William Wilberforce just days prior

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<sup>10</sup> Wesley, i. 49.

<sup>11</sup> Wesley, xi. 67.

<sup>12</sup> Wesley, xi. 74.

to his death in 1791.<sup>13</sup> His “Thoughts upon Slavery” was not addressed to Parliament but rather to slave-holders and traders as a voluntary appeal to set slaves free, an approach Marquardt sees as weak and naïve.<sup>14</sup> Whether Wesley really thought slavery would ever be eliminated short of direct action by Parliament is uncertain. What is clear is that by the end of his life he unstintingly advocated for it, and “his method of sensitizing people to existing injustice in order to inspire them to abolish it ultimately made the decisive contribution to the success of the anti-slavery movement.”<sup>15</sup>

Wesley’s writings concerning race can be analyzed using a theological framework established in chapter two. Thus the three aforementioned biblical principles that help establish a normative link between spiritual revival and racial justice with reconciliation can be applied: the vision of multi-racial heavenly worship, the Pauline insistence on a new social reality in Christ, and Jesus’ fulfillment of social justice for the poor and marginalized. Also, the extent to which Wesley viewed repentance as a necessary component in experiencing these dual realities can be examined. Particular attention is given to “Thoughts upon Slavery.”

#### “The Heavenly Vision of Worship” in Wesley

Wesley doesn’t refer directly to Revelation 5:9 in his writing regarding race. However, in the concluding paragraph to “Thoughts upon Slavery,” in addressing God, he does use the phrase, “thou who hast mingled of one blood all the nations upon earth; have compassion upon these outcasts of men . . . Are not these also the work of thine own

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<sup>13</sup> Wesley, xiii. 153. See also iii. 453, in which he notes in his journal of being influenced by Quaker anti-slavery writings in 1772, and xii. 507, a letter to Thomas Funnell, an antislavery leader, expressing support in 1787.

<sup>14</sup> Marquardt, 74.

<sup>15</sup> Marquardt, 75.

hands, the purchase of thy Son's blood?"<sup>16</sup> This phrasing not only echoes the vision of Revelation 5:9, it demonstrates the ground of Wesley's reasoning for racial justice here to be the universally loving work of God in the creation of humanity and their redemption in Christ. His whole point is that Africans share equally in this theological reality. It is not an overstatement to say Wesley's whole argument in "Thoughts upon Slavery" rests on the theology of Revelation 5:9.

In Marquardt's view Wesley's argument is based on natural law; and prior to its closing appeal to slave holders, slave traders, and the God of love and justice; "up to this point was convincing precisely because he refrained from a method based upon biblical ethics and a proof text approach."<sup>17</sup> In fact, Wesley rarely used a proof text approach in any argument. Instead he tended to sprinkle biblical images and allusions into all his writings, fully cognizant of their biblical context. Furthermore, the whole argument in "Thoughts upon Slavery" is biblical in nature, and seeks rather to nod a hat to "natural law" and enlightenment philosophy insofar as it is consistent with a biblical argument based on the nature of creation and redemption. Surely, Wesley was known for his incorporation of enlightenment philosophy and for giving reason high place in his view of divine revelation. However, for Wesley, the place of reason, though important, was always subservient to Scripture.<sup>18</sup>

Evidence of this can be seen in the way Wesley handles the argument that slavery is an economic necessity. Marquardt correctly points out that according to natural law, "the only argument with which slavery's defenders could avoid moral condemnation and

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<sup>16</sup> Wesley, xi. 79.

<sup>17</sup> Marquardt, 74.

<sup>18</sup> See Wesley, vi. 351.

justify their actions was the argument of economic necessity.”<sup>19</sup> He goes on to note that Wesley refuted this by showing how slavery was not an economic necessity, an argument later validated by Adam Smith. However, Marguardt fails to note that Wesley argues that nonetheless, even if it were an economic necessity, slavery still would be morally proscribed because of the biblical ethics of injustice. Wesley’s brief conclusion is steeped in the language and teaching of Proverbs, “Better no trade than trade procured by villainy. It is far better to have no wealth, than to gain wealth at the expense of virtue. Better is honest poverty, than all the riches bought by the tears, and sweat, and blood, of our fellow-creatures.”<sup>20</sup> This brief argument goes beyond Natural Law and not only is steeped in the language of Proverbs, it inculcates its entire teaching regarding virtue, economics, and poverty.<sup>21</sup> While it may be impossible to understand or isolate Wesley from his Enlightenment context, it is even more fruitless to understand or analyze him apart from his Revival context. And given Wesley’s well-known emphasis on holiness, for him, biblical revival could never be entirely distinct from biblical ethics. “Thoughts upon Slavery” comes out of a tightly reasoned Enlightenment context, but it is steeped in biblical ethics from beginning to end. Its whole intent, as will continue to be shown, is to move readers toward its unavoidable conclusion, which is a stirring, revivalist’s call to repent and embrace the gift of God’s salvation and all it entails. “Thoughts upon Slavery” may or may not have had a significant direct impact upon the slave holders and slave traders to whom it was addressed. However, Wesley’s framing of his conclusion as a direct call to repentance makes complete sense in a revival context, rather than being an

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<sup>19</sup> Marguardt, 74.

<sup>20</sup> Wesley, xi. 73, 74, cf. Proverbs 19:1.

<sup>21</sup> Surely the writer of Proverbs preceded any Enlightenment philosopher on the scene and its wisdom predates ‘Natural Law.’

indicator of “his position’s weakness.”<sup>22</sup> Revelation 5:9 may not have been a proof-text for “Thoughts upon Slavery,” but it fairly breathes through the whole. Individual and corporate repentance *toward* its vision is both driving theme and conclusion of the treatise.

### “Paul’s Insistence on a New Social Reality” in Wesley

Understanding that Paul’s proclamation of a new social reality in Christ was viewed as a necessary concomitant of the revival his first-century readers experienced, we next examine if this reality is alluded to or illustrated in John Wesley’s theological thought and practice regarding race. Evidence from his journal entries and letters previously mentioned and other sources indicates it is well illustrated in his practice and alluded to in his writings.

How Paul’s “one new humanity” social reality in Christ worked itself out in Wesley’s practice is well summed up by Marquardt:

In evangelistic and pastoral praxis Wesley did not distinguish between white and black, free and slaves; people from both groups were won to the Christian faith by his preaching. Slaves were baptized and admitted to the Lord’s Supper together with white persons. Similarly, in America Methodist preachers and slave owners gathered slaves into “classes” and accepted them into their congregations. With astounding freedom from prejudice, people of another race, to whom most of the English populace denied equal worth and equal rights, thus were received as sisters and brothers in the faith, persons to whom the gospel of God’s love applied without restriction. Here a certain parallelism to the Pauline communities is unmistakable.<sup>23</sup>

Connections to the Pauline “one new humanity” social reality appear in “Thoughts upon Slavery” in at least two places. One is in Wesley’s appeal to the slaveholders and traders to “Be gentle toward all men; and see that you invariably do unto every one as you would

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<sup>22</sup> Marquardt, 74.

<sup>23</sup> Marquardt, 71-72; but note how Methodist social reality in America generally, and Delaware specifically, was soon to diverge from this ideal.

he should do unto you.”<sup>24</sup> Is this not an echo of Pauline<sup>25</sup> social ethics in Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 6:1, 10; and Ephesians 4:1-2? The other connection appears in his final appeal to God, “O burst thou all their chains in sunder; more especially the chains of their sins! Thou Savior of all, make them free, that they may be free indeed!”<sup>26</sup> As if there were any previous doubt of Wesley’s rejection of the interpretation of Paul propagated by his church’s Bishop of London back in 1727,<sup>27</sup> this sealed it. Wesley clearly reasoned that God’s gracious act of creation and subsequent gift of redemption implied of necessity both freedom from inward sin as well as “outward condition” for enslaved Africans.

Though Wesley probably did not have it consciously in mind, the parallels between “Thoughts on Slavery” and the progression of his response to slavery, on the one hand, and the book of Philemon, on the other, are striking. First, like Paul, Wesley makes a voluntary appeal based on the Gospel of Christ to his readers (as reasoned and as couched in enlightenment thought as it is) rather than coercing them into a new social reality. Both Paul and Wesley, though, argue from Gospel to the necessity of a new social reality. Second, the question of what Paul would have done if Philemon did not accede to his wish is left unanswered, though Paul clearly implied he would have been justified in being more coercive of Philemon.<sup>28</sup> Wesley’s advocacy of coercive parliamentary action outlawing slavery brought him to a point that was never possible for Paul’s social milieu. Suffice it to say, Wesley’s strategy of first appealing to the

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<sup>24</sup> Wesley, xi. 79.

<sup>25</sup> And Jesus’, cf. Matthew 7:12.

<sup>26</sup> Wesley, xi. 79, also cf. Psalm 107:14; Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18; John 8:36; Acts 12:7; 16:26.

<sup>27</sup> Marquardt, 69.

<sup>28</sup> Philemon 8, 21.

awakened or revived Christian conscience of slaveholders was sublimely Pauline in spirit and approach.

### “Jesus’ Embodiment of Social Justice” in Wesley

One important allusion to the Gospels, reflecting Jesus’ attitude toward the poor and marginalized and the social justice implications of the Reign of God, can be adduced in “Thoughts upon Slavery.” It appears, once again, in the section of direct appeal to slave holders and traders: “‘The blood of thy brother’ (for, whether thou wilt believe it or no, such he is in the sight of Him that made him) ‘crieth against thee from the earth,’ from the ship, and from the waters. O whatever it costs, put a stop to its cry before it be too late: Instantly, at any price, were it the half of your goods, deliver thyself from blood-guiltiness!”<sup>29</sup>

The phrase, “were it half your goods” clearly comes from the previously mentioned<sup>30</sup> account of Zacchaeus, where a privileged, previously unjust person experiences the gift of personal salvation and participation in the social justice implications of the Reign of God simultaneously, including giving half his goods to the Poor. The fact that the biblical context of Luke fits so well into the appeal section of “Thoughts upon Slavery” gives further evidence that Wesley was consciously aware of the context and implications of his biblical allusions. In this case it gives further evidence that “Thoughts upon Slavery” is no mere treatise on social ethics, though the Luke 19 allusion reflects its biblical social ethics context. Nor is “Thoughts upon Slavery” merely a revivalist’s appeal to accept personal and individual salvation, though

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<sup>29</sup> Wesley, xi. 78.

<sup>30</sup> Lk. 19:18; cf. 18:18-22; see above, chapter 2.



the Luke 19 allusion reflects this concern as well. It is, in fact, a profoundly biblical example of *both at the same time*.

Wesley's use of all three biblical principles establishing racial reconciliation and spiritual revival as concomitants, together with his linking these realities with the necessity of repentance, all point to an important integration in Wesley. For him, persons' and communities' heavenly spiritual reality and their earthly social reality were of necessity one reality, just as the personal holiness of the strangely warmed heart and social holiness of its spread throughout the land were of a piece, one dynamic reality – not two competing priorities. If they were not yet one in practice the dynamic vortex of his theology said they needed to be moving in that direction through repentance, justification, and sanctifying grace. As is well attested, Wesley integrated enlightenment and enthusiasm,<sup>31</sup> and reason and revival,<sup>32</sup> in his theological praxis; yet he also practiced another important conceptual integration. In theory and practice, Wesley's holiness-driven, justice-sensitive “one new humanity” theology as applied to race assiduously rejected a bifurcation of: spiritual condition from social condition, the earthly from the heavenly, the personal from the communal, revival from reform. This integration and its steadfast refusal to bifurcate individual personal holiness from social holiness is an insight contemporary Methodists, including the Asbury congregation, as well as all Christians, would do well to recognize and apply to contemporary issues, especially (but not limited) to matters of racial justice and reconciliation.

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<sup>31</sup> Hempton's phrase, see 32-43, especially 42.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce Shelley's phrase in *Church History in Plain Language* (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 327, 350-360.

### Methodist Cultural Accommodation in Matters of Race

However, as the Methodist movement continued to develop in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in America, Wesley's spiritual descendents displayed a mixed record at best in maintaining this integration in its expression of racial attitudes and practice of race relations. As "Methodism settled into denominational mode"<sup>33</sup> two accommodations to its wider cultural context, both affecting race relations, can be adduced, one clearly inconsistent with the gospel of cross and resurrection, the other perhaps more subtle, yet still negatively affecting racial attitudes and race relations to this day.

#### Methodist Embrace of Slavery and Segregation

The first accommodation to its wider cultural context involved the acceptance of race-based slavery in the South, together with its underlying assumptions of the racial superiority of persons of European ancestry and a corresponding inferiority of persons of African ancestry. As Hempton succinctly puts it, "In America Methodism first renounced slavery, then accommodated it."<sup>34</sup>

Lynn Lyerly, writing of southern Methodism . . . shows that out of the "marrow of the Methodist self" emerged a Methodist style of emotionalism, mysticism, asceticism, enthusiasm, and evangelism. So powerful was it that it temporarily broke the dams holding in place the white male honor codes of the South, based on greed, gratification, and slavery. Women and African Americans flocked into Methodism in great numbers, but ultimately Methodism made an unhappy peace with its surroundings and opened the way for a tawdry reconciliation between Methodism and the culture of slavery.<sup>35</sup>

As Noll has shown by extensively examining various theological reflections surrounding the Civil War, written by both European and African Americans, of varying perspectives

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<sup>33</sup> Hempton's phrase, 141.

<sup>34</sup> Hempton, 31.

<sup>35</sup> Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 27-46, cited by Hempton, 83.

and regions; “Even the Civil War that preserved the Union, that broadened out to the Emancipation Proclamation, and that led to the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments did not persuade most Caucasian Americans that African Americans were on their same level of humanity.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, not only did Methodism accommodate race-based slavery in the South, but large numbers of Methodists in the North as well, including many abolitionists, accepted the cultural notion, with profound social implications, that African and European Americans were not on the “same level of humanity.”

Evidence of this subtle yet powerful accommodation to racial prejudice, not only in the South but also in the North, can be seen in Frederick Douglass’ experience in New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1838, after escaping from slavery. He attended Elm Street Methodist Church there with every intention of joining, until he was forced to sit with other African Americans in the back of the gallery, out of sight of white worshippers, and then served communion only after all white persons had received. As Hempton observes:

The layers of paternalism, social segregation, and liturgical discrimination so evident in Douglass’s narrative proved impossible to bear for many African Americans who thought they were part of a movement of spiritual and social egalitarianism, only to discover the manifold restrictions in the kinds of role they could perform in predominantly white congregations. It is important to note, however, that separation from a white-dominated Methodist movement rarely resulted in withdrawal from the Methodist tradition altogether.<sup>37</sup>

Further evidence, not only of Methodist accommodation to slavery in the South, but of “layers of paternalism, social segregation, and liturgical discrimination,” arising from “centuries of inherited race prejudice” in Northern Methodism, can be seen in the formation of separate and distinct denominations, the African Methodist Episcopal

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<sup>36</sup> Noll, 74.

<sup>37</sup> Hempton, 106.

Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, beginning from the late 1700s in Philadelphia and New York. As Mitchell has indicated, the motivation for founding these distinct denominations was not entirely protest against race prejudice; a strong mission orientation also was present.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the assumption by most white Methodists of the racial superiority of European over African Americans was not confined to the South. This can be seen in Richard Allen's humiliating treatment at St. Georges and in the following description of social conditions for African American Methodists in New York in 1796.

[The Negro] was wanted in the church for the support he gave it, for the numbers he enabled sectarians to claim in exhibiting their strength, and with the minority, who were truly pious, he was wanted there for the good of his soul. For these and other reasons he was not kept entirely out of the church. But in the church he was hampered and regulated. His privileges were proscribed and limited; every possible effort was made to impress him with a sense of inferiority. Preachers were selected who delighted in discoursing to him upon such texts as "Servants obey your masters," and who were adept at impressing the negro with inferiority in the most ingenious and least offensive way.<sup>39</sup>

However, as Hempton indicated, because the "doctrines, form of [church] government, and evangelistic and soul-saving emphases of Methodism" continued to resonate with many African American Christians, they remained Methodists, some, where possible, by forming separate African American congregations within the Methodist Episcopal denomination, others in one of the newly formed African American Methodist denominations. Either way, they "could not endure the constant humiliation and restriction imposed by the people into whose hands Methodism had fallen." On the other hand, they logically could remain Methodists because the "founders were opposed to

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<sup>38</sup> Mitchell, 102.

<sup>39</sup> J. W. Hood, *One Hundred Years of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church*, (NY: African Methodist Episcopal Zion Book Concern, 1895), 3, cited by Carolyn Henninger Oehler, *Steps Toward Wholeness: Learning and Repentance*, 14-15.

slavery and inhumane treatment of slaves,” and “because of the spirit of the originators and the meaning of the first-born [Methodist] movement in England and America.”<sup>40</sup>

There may well be something of this historical-spiritual DNA, that “spirit and meaning” of the original movement, which helped sustain African American Methodists during the period and on into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and which African Americans uniquely shaped and furthered, that continues to this day. If so, it is worth recognizing, appreciating and reclaiming as a spiritual resource for Christians of all races in contemporary settings, especially for Methodists. For instance, this “spirit and meaning” of the original movement, not merely a history of racial injustice and separation, is the legitimate shared legacy bequeathed by the common spiritual ancestors of Asbury, Centennial, and Bethel Churches in Smyrna.

Nevertheless, despite the Civil War’s resolution of the slavery issue, Methodism as a whole continued to accommodate itself to racial attitudes inconsistent with the spirit and meaning of the original movement; and this accommodation continued into the widely racially-segregated culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Methodist Episcopal Church had split into Northern and Southern entities prior to the Civil War over the issue of slavery and remained separate denominations until 1939. After the Civil War, formerly enslaved African-American Methodists in the South, recently emancipated, formed the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in 1870, re-named the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in 1954. Though this ecclesiastical separation of former slaves and slave owners who had previously worshiped together in the same churches was often amicable and supported in a paternalistic way by white Methodists, it is further evidence

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<sup>40</sup> William J. Walls, *The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church: Reality of the Black Church*, (Charlotte: AME Zion Publishing House, 1974), 45, cited by Oehler, 15.

that emancipation did little to affect Methodism's accommodation of a "culture of slavery" in terms of racial attitudes, even as it was expressed in church. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South was "unprepared to revise radically its conception of the proper place of the blacks in the Connection. Though [African Americans were] cordially urged to remain in the Church, it was expected that [they] would continue in an inferior and subordinate relation."<sup>41</sup>

This attitude of social superiority continued to be accommodated by leaders at the highest levels of the three predominately European-American Methodist denominations in 1939 in what James Thomas refers to as *Methodism's Racial Dilemma: the Story of the Central Jurisdiction*.<sup>42</sup> As a condition insisted upon by some delegates for the reunification of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, The Methodist Episcopal Church North, and the Methodist Protestant Church, six jurisdictional conferences (formal associations of local congregations) were established in the plan of union— five of which were geographical in nature, one of which was racial. In essence, having first opposed and then accommodated slavery and the race-prejudiced culture underlying it, Methodism as a mainline denomination then moved into the 20<sup>th</sup> century officially accommodating at its highest structural levels both the *de jure* racial segregation and the race-prejudiced, Jim Crow culture underlying it in the South, as well as the *de facto* racial segregation and the more subtly, yet still widely race-prejudiced culture in the North.

That Delaware Methodism as well as its wider culture has reflected both Northern and Southern characteristics of the above-mentioned racial dilemma can be seen in

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<sup>41</sup> Hunter D. Farish, *The Circuit Rider Dismounts: A Social History of Southern Methodism, 1865-1900* (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1938), 168, cited by Oheler, 20.

<sup>42</sup> James S. Thomas, *Methodism's Racial Dilemma: The Story of the Central Jurisdiction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992).

Delaware's continuing effort to racially desegregate its public school system and how this effort compares to local Methodist congregational life. While *de jure* racial segregation ("separate but equal") in public education was outlawed in 1954 and school integration largely accomplished (though not without pain and protest) throughout Delaware in the 1960s by closing all formerly "black" schools, *de facto* racial segregation in public education was found to persist into the late 1970s in northern New Castle County and court ordered busing was established to reverse it. Northern New Castle County is the most "northern" part of the state, both geographically and culturally.

Meanwhile, interestingly, in the realm of Methodist congregational life, the racially composed and segregated Central Jurisdiction of the Methodist Church was dismantled in 1964 and local congregations associated with its Delaware Annual Conference were integrated into the Peninsula Annual Conference (smaller geographically composed association of Methodist congregations, located within the Delaware and Maryland portion of the Delmarva Peninsula – now called the Peninsula-Delaware Conference). However, unlike the lawfully mandated racial integration of each and every local public school (not merely on the district level) in Delaware; though they are better integrated racially at larger structural levels, Methodists throughout Delaware continue largely to practice *de facto* segregation between African and European Americans in worship, fellowship, and mission at the congregational level to this day.

#### Methodist Embrace of Individualistic Culture

This observation regarding the continuing *de facto* racial segregation in contemporary Methodism at the congregational level points to another way in which Methodism not only affected, but was affected by the wider culture in which it operated in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>

century America. This accommodation is associated with the phenomena of “racialization”<sup>43</sup> and racial economic inequities within Methodism and the larger society in more subtle and complex ways, perhaps, than Methodism’s accommodation of attitudes underlying slavery and segregation. Nevertheless, Methodism’s embrace of overtly individualistic culture has greatly affected its race relations and racial attitudes.

Hempton has traced John Wesley’s conception and Methodism’s self understanding as a “voluntary association of equals” and how this differed from more communal understandings of ecclesiology based upon apostolic authority, confessional orthodoxy, or state coercion, and how such a self-understanding helped the church to thrive within “the competitive structure of American religion” and a wider culture that emphasized the sovereignty of the individual choices.<sup>44</sup> As Noll has noted, “Traditional orthodox Christianity was much more likely to be a- or anti-republican than Christianity in the United States;” it was “more likely to be governed by inherited communities of interpretation” and “not particularly democratic.” On the other hand, “While prime contexts for interpreting Scripture were provided for these foreigners by history, tradition, and respect for formal learning, the prime American context was the interpretive will of the people.”<sup>45</sup> Thus by 1860 in “Both North and South, evangelical Protestants who believed that the Bible was true and who trusted their own interpretations of Scripture above all other religious authorities, constituted the nation’s most influential cultural force.” Populist, evangelical Methodists of voluntary association were primary participants in being shaped by and helping to shape this religious, democratic,

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<sup>43</sup> See Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7, for a definition of this term, “A racialized society is a society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships.”

<sup>44</sup> Hempton, 7-8, 51-52, 167.

<sup>45</sup> Noll, 122 .



individualistic culture. Yet as Noll also points out, “There was no recognized authority greater than the *individual* interpretation of Scripture to deploy for the purpose of understanding the Scripture.”<sup>46</sup>

Methodism’s tendency to both convey and be conveyed by this democratic, religious and individualistic culture affected not only its theological approach to slavery and segregation as has been shown, Methodism’s accommodation of individualistic culture also is associated with continuing racial attitudes and race relations in two other specific yet related ways. Namely, this accommodation may have helped to perpetuate both economic injustice and “racialization” in subtle yet important ways.

Regarding economic injustice, Noll also has pointed out, perhaps ironically, that during the Antebellum theological debate within Protestantism over slavery, Southerners charged that individualistic consumer capitalism developing in the North was an ethically dangerous economic system, and Noll also observes that there was a failure to examine this charge biblically.<sup>47</sup> It is understandable that such a charge largely should be ignored for two reasons. First, it was being leveled by persons advocating an obviously inhumane and unjust economic system based on slavery, and therefore likely was dismissed. Second, it is natural that a voluntarily associated, upwardly mobile religious culture highly valuing individual worth and attainment would have a blind spot in critiquing the negative aspects of a macro economic system partly based on individualistic pursuits, not to mention the fact that economically powerful northerners, including religious ones, had little self interest in critiquing an economic system from which they were benefiting. It is perhaps ironic that just as a “commitment to racial anti-prejudice” was accepted by the

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<sup>46</sup> Noll, 28-29.

<sup>47</sup> Noll, 74.

nation only “after immense struggle, late in the twentieth century – if in fact it has been accepted now,” it also was only “late in the twentieth century” that some liberation theologians within Protestantism began linking the social ethics of poverty, race, and culture with an economic critique of North American individualistic consumer capitalism<sup>48</sup> – a critique of individualism first arising out of a region and period many would consider the most blatantly racist in North American history.

Examining further the exact associations between 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Methodism’s accommodation of individualistic culture, and individualistic consumer capitalism’s affect on racial economic injustice goes beyond the scope of this thesis project. However, a link between individualism and racialization has been documented by Emerson and Smith. Methodism’s longstanding association with individualistic religious culture, along with all of evangelical Protestantism’s tendency to analyze all social realities and systems using the “cultural tool kit” of an individualized perspective has helped perpetuate the reality of “racialization” in America. In a movement with a deeply imbedded historical understanding as a “voluntary association,” operating in a church culture and wider culture that values individual choice and freedom, it is not surprising that Methodists especially should choose to organize themselves locally in racially, ethnically, and culturally homogeneous groupings. It is, quite simply, most natural and comfortable that way. One would expect there to be an historic tendency in this direction in the American church context even if race prejudice and systemic economic injustice were not present. Since they are present, however, these realities have combined with the individualistic, voluntary-association context to encourage, however

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<sup>48</sup> For instance see Harold Recinos, *Jesus Weeps: Global Encounters on Our Doorstep* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 15.

unconsciously, *de facto* racial segregation in Methodist local church life from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the present. What Emerson and Smith have gone to great lengths to demonstrate is that continued accommodation among evangelical Protestants of all races to the individualistic, voluntary-association context that results in such *de facto* congregational segregation – this continued accommodation only serves to perpetuate and further entrench the racial attitudes and systemic economic inequities associated with the longstanding racialization of our society. Indeed they sound a rather somber note in their conclusion for a predominantly European-American congregation like Asbury that wishes to be an agent of spiritual renewal and reconciliation rather than an unwitting perpetuator of further racial injustice.

Our examination of a variety of data and consideration of a variety of levels of social influence suggest that many race issues that white evangelicals want to see solved are generated in part by the way they themselves do religion, interpret their world, and live their own lives. These factors range from the ways evangelicals and others organize into internally similar congregations, and the segregation and inequality such congregations help produce; to theologically rooted evangelical cultural tools, which tend to (1) minimize and individualize the race problem, (2) assign blame to blacks themselves for racial inequality, (3) obscure inequality as part of racial division, and (4) suggest uni-dimensional solutions to racial division.<sup>49</sup>

Fortunately, though Emerson and Smith propose no solutions for congregations to the conundrums enumerated above in their book, Emerson subsequently co-authored another book which positively advocates intentionally multi-racial congregations as part of a greater strategy, not only to undo the negative factors listed above, but also as a hope

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<sup>49</sup> Emerson and Smith, 170.

filled starting point, not for perpetuating, but rather for positively reversing systemic racial inequities in American society.<sup>50</sup> This strategy will be examined in chapter four.

### Theological Principles Applied

Given this brief assessment of American Methodist history regarding race relations and racial attitudes in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the analytical framework suggested by the theological principles enumerated in chapter two may be applied. Early Methodist experience of multiracial worship in England and America seemed to have beautifully reflected and anticipated the multiracial heavenly worship culture of Revelation 5:9. To the extent, however, that Methodism accommodated either enforced or preferred segregation based on race, in either worship settings or denominational structures, it retreated from heavenly reality. The same can be said regarding Methodism's experience of Pauline "one new humanity" social reality during the period. The second-class social treatment afforded to African Americans was a clear violation of Paul's social ethic. Regarding Jesus' embodiment of social justice, Methodist protest of race-based slavery comported well with Jesus' attitude, while any later accommodation to slavery and its continuing, underlying race-prejudice into the next century of segregation was a departure from the new life God was seeking to rekindle. Jesus' gospel of cross and resurrection is infused with implications that are *both* deeply individualistic *and* intensely communal. The extent to which Methodism's accommodation of justice-denying, overly-individualistic culture has perpetuated racial inequities in church and society is also regrettable in light of Jesus' concern for social justice and mercy.

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<sup>50</sup> Cutiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2003).

However, despite these retreats from heavenly ideals in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Methodism, a strong strand of historical-spiritual DNA relating to both social and individual piety, both revival and reform, can be traced. The “croaking” tradition of Methodist historiography Hempton mentions represents not only a tendency to glorify unrealistically the spiritual accomplishments of past personages and eras,<sup>51</sup> it also signifies a willingness on the part of Methodists throughout the period to examine their “fruit” and even practice a sincere and corporate repentance when necessary.

More recently, where the ideals of racial and economic justice inherent in Wesleyan social holiness have become bifurcated from the pursuit of individual piety, the United Methodist denomination has made serious attempts to repent. Examples include abolishing Central Jurisdiction racial segregation in 1964 and establishing the General Commission on Religion and Race with its ongoing work for racial justice and reconciliation in church and society. Church leaders created “A Study Guide for United Methodist Congregations in preparation for an Act of Repentance for Racism and Pan-Methodist Conversations on Union,” and participated in a formal Act of Repentance for Racism at the 2000 United Methodist General Conference. The denomination still values the warm hearted experience of individual grace and salvation, as can be seen in numerous program resources for evangelism and spiritual growth provided for individuals, small groups and local congregations. Additionally, whereas concerns for personal piety are rarely absent from Religion and Race resources, concerns for social justice are rarely absent from official Discipleship Resources.

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<sup>51</sup> Hempton, 184.

## Conclusion

Thus, racial injustice from which to repent and a vulnerability to cultural accommodation inconsistent with the gospel do not form the entire historical-spiritual “tool kit” contemporary Methodist congregations carry with them into the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Important strengths inherent in Methodism’s historical-spiritual DNA are still included, still part of a costly spiritual heritage from which persons and congregations might powerfully draw. Though Methodism’s long and recent history of integrating the facets well on the local congregational level is mixed; the strong, double-faceted gem of both individual and social holiness is still there. And it is beautiful.

Like that moving vortex, all this swirls and converges to form a crucial question for Asbury United Methodist Church, Smyrna, Delaware, together with Centennial United Methodist Church and all willing to have a part: As they move into a resurrecting God’s future, how might they together utilize and synthesize, deeply and personally, *both* the individual *and* social (including racial and economic) holiness inherent in their Methodist spiritual-historical DNA? How might they discard the dirt and share the gem?

Chapter four will explore practical resources and models for doing so.

## CHAPTER FOUR CHOOSING A STRATEGY: STEPS TO A PARTNERSHIP

### **Introduction**

Chapters one and two demonstrated that in response to the recent re-discovery of its historic African-American cemetery and issues of past racial injustice and insensitivity inherent in this discovery, the predominantly European-American congregation, Asbury United Methodist Church, Smyrna, Delaware has an unprecedented opportunity to embody a biblically supported, resurrection-based practical theology of spiritual renewal through repentance and racial reconciliation. Chapter three identified a spiritual strength worthy of intentional inculcation and a vulnerability of which to be aware within its broader Methodist heritage, as Asbury seeks to make a theologically and historically-informed ongoing response. This chapter will explore practical ministry resources, strategies, and models for congregational life that might be utilized in living out the theology. Though resources, strategies, and models will be analyzed with a specific ministry setting in mind, it is hoped that this chapter will prove especially helpful to other congregations seeking racial reconciliation and spiritual renewal through intentionally multiethnic, multicultural ministries.

In what follows it will be argued that the strategic-partnership congregational model and the study resource *Steps to Wholeness: Learning and Repentance* initially provide the most promising tools for Asbury and other congregations in Smyrna in order

to apply the theology previously described most faithfully to this actual situation.<sup>1</sup>

Before describing and analyzing three basic congregational models from which Asbury and most local churches ultimately must choose, however; several practical resources will be analyzed, and the necessity for intentionality and this necessity's implications will be examined.

### **Practical Resources, Tools, Studies, Concepts, Practices**

There is a plethora of strategies, programs, and resources available for congregations interested in racial reconciliation and spiritual renewal through multi-ethnic, multi-cultural ministries.<sup>2</sup> The following is a limited sampling of some materials that could function as texts or study guides for persons, groups or entire congregations; or that describe practical tools or concepts to be utilized in building intentionally-multi-cultural Christian community.

John Perkins has written several books describing his experience in pursuing racial reconciliation and multi-cultural community-building in several communities in Mississippi in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and offers a three-part strategy of relocation, reconciliation, and redistribution. Though not a Methodist, Perkins' perspective could prove especially helpful because of the inimitable, passionate way he integrates the social-justice and individual-holiness concerns inherent in chapters two and three of this study. "Relocation" relates to the concern for intentionality examined below.

"Reconciliation" describes the importance of an unbroken connection between individual

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<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Henninger Oehler, *Steps Toward Wholeness: Learning and Repentance* (Nashville: General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns of the United Methodist Church, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, the list of resources available from the web page for the General Commission on Religion and Race of the United Methodist Church, [cited 10 January 2007]. Online: [www.gcorr.org/resources/index.htm](http://www.gcorr.org/resources/index.htm). Also "djchuang," [cited 10 January 2007]. Online: [www.djchuang.com/multi/](http://www.djchuang.com/multi/)



salvation with God and cross-racial personal relationships, while “Redistribution” assiduously insists that working for racial and economic justice at every level of Christian endeavor is not optional. Perkins advocates a community development approach that is intentionally Christian and intentionally multi-cultural for implementing racial and economic justice.<sup>3</sup>

Eric Law provides congregations with several useful concepts and tools that are applicable in multi-cultural study and work groups. These include the “cycle of gospel living,” the practice of “mutual invitation,” and the concept of “the margin of grace.” The cycle of gospel living is where already empowered people learn to give up power, taking up their cross on a journey toward sacrificial service and death with Christ, and where relatively powerless people learn to receive empowerment embodied in the resurrection. The key is to teach people to enter at the appropriate point and to keep moving through the cycle. It is a useful paradigm for this study because it arises from a theology of cross and resurrection and useful to persons in congregations because it enables people to envision themselves working together cooperatively “with neither shame nor superiority vis-à-vis one another”<sup>4</sup> despite acknowledging varying levels of economic and social power. Mutual invitation is a deceptively simple way to manage group interactions that seems to even out the perceived power dynamics of multi-cultural groups. The grace margin is a useful paradigm for helping congregations and church

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<sup>3</sup> John M. Perkins, *With Justice for All* (Ventura: GL Publications, 1982); *Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> See below, chapter 2, for the theological import of this phrase.

groups devise local strategies for reaching and including persons different from themselves whom they otherwise would tend to ignore or unintentionally exclude.<sup>5</sup>

Louise Derman-Sparks and Carol Brunson Phillips provide a developmental approach from a secular educational perspective. Their book can help European Americans identify the reality of racial inequities in our society and their unconscious role in perpetuating them, and is helpful as far as it goes. However, this approach and that taken by Joseph Barndt do not yet provide congregational groups practical tools with which to apply a theology of reconciliation and justice to the ins and outs of every day life and relationships. For instance, Barndt helpfully uses the metaphor of a prison wall to describe the reality of racism—a prison wall that confines European Americans as well as persons of other ethnic heritages, and reasons that since European Americans collectively have the most economic and social power in this nation they are primarily responsible for tearing down this prison and erecting something new. However, Barndt then uses six chapters and 144 pages to identify and describe the wall in excruciating detail, then devotes twelve pages for ideas on how actually to tear down the wall and build something new with little practicality or specificity.<sup>6</sup>

Tony Campolo and Michael Battle take a more balanced approach in both describing the realities of racial injustice and offering ways to mitigate them using a Christian spirituality that deliberately draws from African, as well as European and

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<sup>5</sup> Eric H. F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993), 74, 79-88; *Inclusion: Making Room for Grace* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 43.

<sup>6</sup> Louise Derman-Sparks and Carol Brunson Phillips, *Teaching/Learning Anti-Racism: A Developmental Approach* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997); Joseph Barndt, *Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991); though note Barndt's continuing effort to meet this need for practicality, Joseph Barndt and Charles Ruehle, "Rediscovering a Heritage Lost: A European-American Anti-Racist Identity," *Sojourners* (September 1995): 73-77.

American cultural traditions.<sup>7</sup> Beyond the practical value of the spiritual disciplines they suggest, what is particularly valuable is their approach of intentionally culling from a number of cultural traditions and their unstated assumption that there is something valuable from all human cultures for persons of Christian faith to discern as well as aspects of which to be critical. To the extent that their approach comports with the “intermingling of all that is biblical and Christ-centered within diverse cultures for the purpose of a fuller experience and expression of Christ in the church and in the world,” it is both practical and consistent with the theology described herein.<sup>8</sup>

One practical concept Campolo and Battle describe and illustrate may be particularly helpful to Asbury and other congregations in the future. They refer to this as a “self-critical approach to multiculturalism.”<sup>9</sup> While multiculturalism has been shown to be a component of heavenly reality, as has been argued in chapter two, there is still a need to prevent multiculturalism from becoming a Babel-like idol that descends into complete, chaotic relativism. Some objective point of reference, not merely relativistic observations of obvious cultural differences, is necessary in order to be self-critical and evaluate one’s own culture, let alone to point out “specks”<sup>10</sup> or “bathwater” that ought to be removed from anyone else’s culture. Again, as argued in chapter two, Newbigin suggests the biblical revelation of cross and resurrection as the culture-transcendent reference point from which to avoid both cultural imperialism and complete cultural relativism. While no one culture has a monopoly on this objective reality, it is being

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<sup>7</sup> Tony Campolo and Michael Battle, *The Church Enslaved: A Spirituality of Racial Reconciliation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, “A Vision for Racial Harmony,” n.p. [cited 10 January 2007]. Online: <http://www.bbcmpls.org/racialharmony/rhvision>.

<sup>9</sup> Campolo and Battle, 125.

<sup>10</sup> Mt. 7:1-5.

argued here that it becomes the shared basis upon which a synergistic, unapologetically-Christian multiculturalism can be pursued – again, where diverse persons and communities together might express, share, learn about, and evaluate their own and others’ cultural identities, and even together create new cultural expressions – *without shame and without superiority vis-à-vis one another*. They do not know what new, creative expressions of culture will arise; but they know before-hand where their multiculturalism is heading, that is, toward the “all satisfying, everlasting, God-centered, Christ-exalting experience of many-colored worship depicted in Revelation 5:9.

As an example of Campolo and Battle’s at least moving in this direction, they advocate something particularly relevant for Smyrna United Methodists of European and African descent. After (self-critically) pointing out the tendency for European-American Christians to over-utilize the individualized perspective of Western culture and problems this creates, they also describe the tendency in traditional African cultures to emphasize communal identity. As an example of intentionally Christian, self-critical multiculturalism they advocate a bringing together of these two cultural emphases in the practice of prayer:

In African Christian spirituality, the African person brings her or his desire to find the experience of God in every facet of life without exception. Western Christians, formed in the pattern of religion as one part of life, can be disconcerted by the wholistic view presented by their African brothers or sisters, but we have much to gain from African Christian spirituality. *At the same time, the distinct values of both African and Western worldviews can enrich each other, with the Western person learning the value of communal experience as formative of the self, and the African person coming to a deeper awareness of individual uniqueness.* [emphases mine] In the next chapter we will explore how this African understanding can inform efforts toward racial reconciliation between white and black churches in the United States.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Campolo and Battle, 88-89.

They describe a practice of contemplative prayer that deliberately draws from both African and Western spirituality.<sup>12</sup> Their self-critical yet intentionally Christian approach to multiculturalism as a general concept, as well as the specific prayer discipline they describe may be resources Asbury and other congregations should keep in mind.

Norman Anthony Peart provides congregations only broad suggestions for actually implementing programs of racial reconciliation, and even less regarding implementing justice, though his Bible study material is both thorough and user-friendly. In addition, his “Reconciliation Continuum” is a useful concept in that it provides study groups in congregations a means by which to identify some common pit-falls in past attempts at multiracial ministry in local church settings, and to learn how not to repeat the mistakes.<sup>13</sup>

Case studies of actual congregations pursuing racial reconciliation and the building of multicultural community may also prove helpful. Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim examine four multiracial congregations for practical insights and challenges in pursuing this reality.<sup>14</sup> Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook’s detailed analysis of six congregations or congregational partnerships provides contemporary examples of each of the three congregational models described below. In addition, her annotated bibliography and resource list for churches seeking to build multiracial community includes resources from a broad range of perspectives, is thorough, and helpfully categorized.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Campolo and Battle, 116-122.

<sup>13</sup> Norman Anthony Peart, *Separate No More: Understanding and Developing Racial Reconciliation in Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Curtiss Paul DeYoung, et al, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 75-98.

<sup>15</sup> Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, *A House of Prayer for All Peoples: Congregations Building Multiracial Community* (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, 2002), 186-232.

While all these resources and many more have some value to Asbury Church in its cemetery response and in its ongoing attempts to make tangible a resurrection-based theology of spiritual renewal through repentance and racial reconciliation, the most promising resource is the *Steps to Wholeness* study for the following reasons. It assumes repentance on every level—individual, congregational, and corporate—toward a new reality is necessary in responding to past racial injustices within the Methodist family, comporting well with the third assumption inherent in this study’s theology. The assumption of the need for repentance inherent in the study also gives Asbury a means by which to examine repentance as a possible component of its cemetery response, and to formulate such a proposed action in a supportive, informed context. The resource also makes extensive use of the previously-identified, spiritual-historical, dual-faceted, Methodist “gem” by engaging participants in acts of personal piety all-the-while leading them to reflect together on social justice as it relates to race in church and society. Concerns for building both social and individual holiness, a warm heart and a justice-rich Methodist family, are merged rather than bifurcated in this study and not pitted against each another. Furthermore, it is designed intentionally to be used by groups specifically including (though not limited to) both African-American and European-American Methodists, making it ideal for multiethnic small groups inclusive of persons from the Asbury, Centennial, and Bethel congregations. Finally, it is especially applicable for Smyrna Methodists because several of its chapters highlighting African-American Methodist history can be connected easily to local Smyrna area history, making it potentially relevant and interesting to participants.

### **The Need for Intentionality**

Before moving on to analyzing three possible congregational models from which Asbury and other local churches might choose, it needs to be recognized that intentionality will remain a crucial concern in using resources and choosing a strategy for living out the theology. The underlying reasons that make unstinting intention so important for racial justice and reconciliation have been touched upon in chapters two and three.

The homogeneous unit principle introduced in chapter two, though rejected on theological grounds as conscious strategy, is an observable sociological reality. It will go “against the grain” to resist it. To do so takes intentionality. As salient an observer of the American church scene as Lyle Schaller attests to its validity as an observable phenomenon and an issue with which congregations need to wrestle.

[Lyle] Schaller also suggests establishing multiple subgroups as a response to diversity. He frequently argues that regardless of the theological arguments for and against the adoption of the “homogeneous unit principle” as a self-conscious strategy, the empirical evidence suggests that it works. Attempts to grow heterogeneous congregations usually fail. People from diverse backgrounds experience greater difficulty in establishing close fellowship ties. Such fellowship demands personal sharing, which in turn demands mutual understanding and trust, something that is much harder to establish among people with very different experiences and backgrounds.<sup>16</sup>

This is not to suggest a particular strategy or congregational model, but it is to point out that no matter what congregational model is chosen, intentionality will be an issue in attempting any multiracial, multicultural ministry.

In addition, as demonstrated in chapter three, there is an ongoing tendency in Methodism, deeply rooted in its voluntary-association history, especially among European-Americans, to accommodate itself uncritically to overly individualistic culture

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel V.A Olson, “Learning from Lyle Schaller: Social Aspects of Congregations,” *Christian Century*, 110, No. 3, 82.

– as is probably true to a certain extent among all evangelical Protestants. Though individual *together with* social piety is a “double-strength” in Methodist spiritual-historical DNA, “baby” not “to throw out;” an uncritical accommodation to overly individualized culture also is a vulnerability of which to be aware in Methodist spiritual-historical DNA. The tendency to accommodate a perspective that confines itself to individualistic analysis entirely, even if previously unconscious, is probably “bathwater” that needs to be discarded – with intentionality.

Thus what happens is the naturally occurring homogeneous unit principle combines with this historic individualistic cultural tendency within Methodism; and together they then exert enormous, often unconscious, sociological pressure on congregations *not* to engage one another across racial, ethnic, or cultural lines. Almost centrifugal-like sociological forces operate to force persons away from one another into an equilibrium of racially and culturally homogeneous groupings. If the segregated equilibrium these sociological and internalized historical forces helped maintain was somehow balanced with regard to wealth and opportunity within the overall society, let alone within the Christian community, they might seem fairly benign. However, the segregated aspect of the equilibrium would still be unreflective of Revelation 5:9 and problematic in light of the “one new humanity” theology argued herein. In addition, however, spiritually speaking, what also can make these sociological and historic forces seem doubly demonic in nature is that the social equilibrium they help to perpetuate is demonstrably *not* equitable and *not* just with regard to race, ethnicity, wealth, and opportunity, and therefore doubly unreflective of the normative, resurrection-based, heavenly social reality.



In other words, racialization has been shown by Fong and others to be unbiblical.<sup>17</sup> If racialization in church and society is unbiblical in itself, inequitable racialization is doubly unbiblical and insidious. In Ephesians, sandwiched between an explanation of “one new humanity”<sup>18</sup> theology in chapter two, and an appeal to live out this theology in individual and communal holiness in chapters four and five, Paul mentions “rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” apparently opposed to God and God’s will as seen in the reconciling, resurrected Jesus. It is as if they taunt God and all of creation by saying, “This theology cannot be lived out; this cannot and will not be accomplished in social reality.” Are the historical, sociological, centrifugal-like forces that help perpetuate unjust and inequitable racialization in church and society not included in the “rulers and powers and spiritual forces of wickedness” against which Paul subsequently urges unstinting resistance in chapter six?<sup>19</sup> Stephen Mott and others also have posited the demonic nature of historical and sociological forces that oppress people.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, once congregations become aware of these powerful, spiritually insidious, sociological and historic forces, operating upon them whether they like it or not, in a direction contrary to the revealed will of God in Scripture as argued in this thesis; not resisting them is no longer an option. For the spiritual descendents of Wesley, can this resistance against “spiritual forces of wickedness” not be considered part and parcel of their communal sanctification process, spreading scriptural holiness throughout the land? The point being made here, however, is this: to choose consciously *not* to accommodate

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<sup>17</sup> Bruce Fong, *Racial Equality in the Church* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996); see above, chapter 2.

<sup>18</sup> Ephesians 2:14-22, especially v. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 6:12

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1982).

and be shaped by these forces takes unstinting effort. It requires intention. It is hard. This will be an ongoing truth no matter which resource materials are utilized or particular congregational model is chosen.

Thus virtually everyone who writes about the subject of racial justice and reconciliation makes this point. To oppose these forces takes unstinting spiritual effort. It is a spiritual battle that can disrupt all of life. It cannot be just an afterthought or hobby. There is intense temptation on the part of the most advantaged not to resist. For example, Perkins' strategy for relocation invites persons not only to overcome inertia, but to resist these powerfully centrifugal spiritual-sociological forces that naturally propel economically advantaged people away from economically disadvantaged communities. He calls on Christians literally to relocate. "Jesus relocated. He didn't commute to earth one day a week and shoot back up to heaven. . . . The incarnation is the ultimate relocation." Perkins also comments, "Deep problems require sacrificial solutions. Let's not water down the ideal for those God *is* calling to relocate."<sup>21</sup> Law speaks of the sheer effort required to build and maintain multicultural community and advocates that such community building be intentional but temporary.

These communities need to be temporary because it is unrealistic to expect people to function outside their cultural boundaries all the time. Sometimes the anxiety is too great. One friend of mine described her experience in a multicultural environment as walking into a minefield. "You never know when you are triggering a bomb." People need to "go home" to their own comfortable cultural environment. That is where they can process their experience further and use what they have learned.<sup>22</sup>

Again, the point here is the intentional effort required to resist the pressures, not necessarily the specific strategy Law advocates. It is easier and more comfortable not to

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<sup>21</sup> Perkins, *With Justice for All*, 88; *Beyond Charity*, 76.

<sup>22</sup> Eric H. F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993), 80.

resist at all, or at least not much. Some years ago Bishop Roy Nichols described the previously mentioned 1965 merger of the formerly segregated United Methodist Delaware and Peninsula Conferences as “squeezy.”<sup>23</sup> Such efforts are never easily accomplished, and never pursued without intention. The same may be expected in the future.

For instance, when Bill McCartney of the Promise Keepers movement made racial reconciliation an intentional priority for himself and his organization in the mid-1990s and went around speaking about this concern in churches across America, he recalls, “In city after city, church after church, it was the same story—wild enthusiasm while I was being introduced, followed by a morgue-like chill as I stepped away from the microphone.” The theme for Promise Keepers conferences in 1996 was racial reconciliation. McCartney observes, “I personally believe it was a major factor in the significant falloff in Promise Keepers’ 1997 attendance—it is simply a hard teaching for many.”<sup>24</sup> Emerson and Smith demonstrate how the social context of conservative evangelicalism significantly contributes to the resistance McCartney encountered. As has been shown in chapter three, mid-Atlantic Methodism with its evangelical Protestant associations, shares some aspects of this social-historical context – including some unique nuances, vulnerabilities, and latent strengths. Nevertheless Emerson and Smith eloquently witness to the formidable forces of resistance at play.

Evangelical leaders can call for an end to racialization, and are able to influence ordinary white evangelicals on race-relations issues, but only within a small range of possibilities, limited by the social positions and theological understandings of the mass of ordinary evangelicals. The radical message of the early racial

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<sup>23</sup> Based on the author’s recollection of an address Bishop Nichols gave during the 1990s to a session of the Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

<sup>24</sup> Bill McCartney with David Halbrook, *Sold Out: Becoming Man Enough to Make a Difference* (Waco: Word Publishing, 1997), cited in Emerson and Smith, 67-68.

reconciliation leaders [here the authors are referring to the aforementioned John Perkins and others], by the time it got to white, grassroots evangelicals, was minimized to little more than having respect for people of other races, or having a cross-race friendship. When a more radical message is pushed, as the leader of Promise Keepers, Bill McCartney, observed, the walls go up, and those in his conservative Christian subculture tune him out.<sup>25</sup>

Thus a practical implication arises for Asbury Church from this established necessity for intention. As it seeks to respond to its own past cemetery history and pursue racial reconciliation, it simply should expect profound resistance – “walls” and “tuning out.”

Therefore a practical question also arises in evaluating and choosing resources and a congregational model for pursuit of the biblical ideal. Which model will help them most effectively resist these spiritually insidious, inequitable-racialization perpetuating, sociological-historical forces? This necessity for intention demands that the chosen model be both realistic and downright revolutionary. In other words, the model needs to be realistic enough to be sustained “for the long haul” against considerable resistance, yet also revolutionary enough to help create a new Revelation 5:9-reflective social reality.

### **Three Congregational Models**

With this review of potential resources and concern for the necessity of unstinting intentionality in view, congregational models for pursuing racial justice and reconciliation may now be described and analyzed. After initial prayer and discernment, it seems existing congregations must eventually choose to pursue one of three general strategies or approaches in terms of a congregational model. These include seeking to become a multicultural or multiethnic church by promoting heterogeneous fellowship within a single congregation; becoming a multi-congregational church by promoting homogeneous groups and ministries within a local church organization; or engaging in a

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<sup>25</sup> Emerson and Smith, 167-168.

strategic partnership with an existing congregation of a different racial, ethnic, or cultural identity. In what follows each of the three congregational models will be described and analyzed in light of concerns raised thus far. A brief case study of a local United Methodist example of each of the three models also will be included. This analysis will demonstrate that the strategic partnership, at least initially, is the most promising congregational model for Asbury to choose in its ongoing cemetery response and pursuit of racial reconciliation.

### The Multicultural Congregation Model

The first potential strategic aim is to become a multicultural church. A multicultural church is a local church that promotes heterogeneous fellowship across racial, ethnic, or cultural lines in all aspects of congregational life, including its worship, nurture, and outreach. Of the three strategic aims, such a model would be the best fulfillment of the vision of heavenly worship expressed in Rev. 5:9. Using the imagery of fruit introduced in chapter two, this model would seem naturally to offer the best framework for achieving “fruit salad.” It is hard to conceive of the worship portrayed in Revelation as existing in permanently segregated groups that do not have fellowship or worship simultaneously and together.

The second biblical principle which may be applied to the multicultural local church model is the new social reality in Christ presented in the epistles. Again, as with the heavenly vision of worship, it is difficult to conceive of these first century faith communities as segregated pockets of ethnically and culturally homogeneous people. The implicit evidence in the text of the epistles, particularly that of Galatians, would indicate that these communities were indeed ethnically and culturally mixed and the

resulting social stress this created needed to be addressed theologically and pastorally. It is as if Paul is saying in so many words, “Look, this multicultural situation is messy, but it is theologically necessary, so let’s work it out in a way that is faithful to Christ.” D. J. Chuang eloquently states the benefits of pursuing this reality with intention despite the risks.

The **kingdom** of God is fully manifested when the people of God, the **Body** of Christ comes together in real life everyday fellowship. It requires extremely hard work and the risk of being hurt by one another, bearing one another’s pain, humble confessions for even unintentional sins and sins of our kinsmen, forgiveness in the spirit by the Spirit, and face-to-face heart-to-heart reconciliation (so enemies become friends). Any shortcuts or stops in the process short circuits the **ministry of reconciliation** with which we’ve been entrusted (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). This is an incredibly dynamic, paradoxical, dissonant, yet synergistic powerful stuff, achieved through **intentionality**, transparent **relationships**, and keenly aware of our **intuition**. The reward is a deeper **richness** in our humanity, giving the **uniqueness** from our cultural heritage to others, and receiving new **mercies** from their cultural heritage. We become much more than what our own ethnocentric culture offers, and experience a gushing overflow of God’s blessings through those who are different from ourselves. Let’s come to the **Table** together [emphasis the author’s].<sup>26</sup>

Since Paul nowhere proposed segregating Gentile and Jewish believers of a given locality in worship and fellowship,<sup>27</sup> the contemporary multicultural church may be the purest expression of this biblical principle.

The third biblical principle to be applied to the multicultural local church model is the social justice inherent in the gospels. From a purely theoretical standpoint, the only way to assure no possibility of inter-racial or inter-ethnic injustice within a given local church body is to make sure there is complete homogeneity of ethnicity or race. That way no one can oppress or dominate anyone else across racial or ethnic lines (at least within that local church). In reality, some oppressed peoples have found this strategy

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<sup>26</sup> D. J. Chuang, “djchuang,” n.p. [cited Sept. 2002]. Online: [www.djchuang.com/multiethnic.htm](http://www.djchuang.com/multiethnic.htm).

<sup>27</sup> In fact, he opposed this; see Gal. 2:11-12.

precisely necessary for their own protection and dignity. As was shown in chapter three, this is surely the case for African-American Christians of Methodist heritage. The back cover of Law's book states this generalization, "Whites of Northern European origin tend to dominate in multicultural situations, driving those of other races and ethnic groups to silent rage or outright rebellion." He cites a study by Geert Hofstede<sup>28</sup> and his own experience in leading church conferences to support the generalization. In the North American social context, in many cases, the truly multicultural local church model may not be appropriate because of a concern for social justice within the worship and fellowship life of that congregation. One of the other models may be needed to create the kind of atmosphere in which marginalized people can participate fully in the fellowship. In other cases, it simply may be impractical because of the massive energy needed to make sure there is a just sharing of power and participation among different kinds of people in the same local church.<sup>29</sup>

Some congregations, however, choose to "work it out" despite the challenges. According to Harry E. Winter, O.M.I., former pastor of St. Ann's Catholic Parish in Fayetteville, NC, a congregation that is forty percent African-American, fifteen percent Korean-American, and forty-five percent white, maintaining a just sharing of participation and perceived power among the various ethnic groups of the congregation was taxing but worth it.

African-Americans and Korean-Americans are important components of the parish. The very first thing I learned was that if special attention were not paid to the African-American community, it shrank. Whether it was representatives on the pastoral council, lectors or eucharistic ministers, there had to be ecclesiastical

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<sup>28</sup> Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*, abridged edition (Beverly Hills, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1987), 11, referred to in Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*, 19.

<sup>29</sup> Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*, 80.

“affirmative action.” I’m not sure why it happens, but time and again I saw it. It was both rewarding and time-consuming to make sure that parishioners from all components were promoted into positions of leadership. . . . Despite the presence of so many talented African-Americans, a paradoxical pattern existed. Unless the whites paid attention, they, as the largest group, smothered the initiatives of the others.<sup>30</sup>

According to Law’s analysis, it is easy to see why so much time and effort and energy must be spent managing the perceived power dynamics in a multicultural church, particularly one that includes significant percentages of whites and people of color.

A few practical observations regarding the multicultural church model are in order here, especially as they relate to the biblical principle of justice. One is that many multicultural churches did not intentionally seek to become multicultural. According to research conducted by the Congregations Project, based at Rice University, many congregations that are currently racially or ethnically mixed are comprised of persons who already socialized with people of different backgrounds at work, school, or in recreational activities. “By becoming part of the [racially mixed] church, their social networks became even more diverse and extensive.”<sup>31</sup> It is clear that there was already something of a shared culture that this ethnically mixed group of persons brought with them into the church. Thus Craig Kennet Miller can advocate for “the creation of single-culture multiethnic faith communities that reflect the demographic make-up of their population.”<sup>32</sup> Finally, according to Floyd “Butch” Gamarra, missionary for multicultural ministries in the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, many of the Pentecostal and independent churches that are racially and ethnically mixed “tend to attract more

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<sup>30</sup> Harry E. Winter, “Multicultural Parishes,” *America*, 174, No. 2, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Emerson, professor of sociology at Rice University, quoted in John Dart, “Hues in the Pews,” *Christian Century*, 118, No. 7, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Craig Kennet Miller, “Creating New Faith Communities,” *Partners in Discipleship*, 2. [cited Sept. 2002]. Online: [http://www.gdob.org/partners\\_in\\_discipleship/creatingnewfaith\\_partner.html](http://www.gdob.org/partners_in_discipleship/creatingnewfaith_partner.html).



working-class people who are in the same social, economic class. The mix is a lot easier.”<sup>33</sup> It becomes difficult to escape the observation that in many presently multi-ethnic or multi-racial congregations, there is still an important homogeneity of culture or socio-economic class. “Almost none of the multiracial churches that were successful had integration as their goal. Something else was the goal that united them. For evangelicals it was reaching the neighborhood and urban areas, and maybe for liberal mainline churches it would be the environment or social justice issues.”<sup>34</sup>

A second observation is that mainline Protestant churches are the least likely of all churches to be multicultural. The Congregations Project estimates that two to three percent of mainline churches have a mixed membership, compared to eight percent for churches overall.<sup>35</sup> “Mainline folks, for all their talk about diversity, lag significantly behind.” Reasons cited for this usually include the disproportionately upper-middle-class, highly-educated character of traditional Anglo mainline congregations, as well as age. According to researchers, the younger people are on average, the more open they are to multicultural experiences.<sup>36</sup> No doubt these demographic factors are important.

However, another reason mainline Protestant congregations are rarely multiethnic may well be that multiethnicity at the local church level is simply not a theological or strategic priority. Far more emphasis is placed on creating a just and loving society beyond the local church than in creating an ethnically diverse fellowship within it. Diversity with social justice is lauded and often effectively achieved at the institutional and societal level. With regard to church structures beyond the local church, as Carnegie

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Dart, 7.

<sup>34</sup> George Yancey of the University of North Texas, as quoted in Dart, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Dart, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Nancy Ammerman, project director of The Organizing Religious Work project out of the seminary-based Hartford Institute for Religion Research, as quoted in Dart, 7.

Samuel Calian observes, “Mainline denominations do a better job at creating a mix of people running institutions and sitting on commissions where we have more control.”<sup>37</sup>

With regard to society at large, John Dart contends that the mainline churches’ involvement in public advocacy and justice issues remains “quietly effective.”<sup>38</sup> The mainline commitment to social justice within and especially beyond the church remains strong.

However, in the United Methodist Church, for instance, the institutional church’s commitment to social justice within the local congregation has not translated into a particularly stirring call for existing congregations to become racially or ethnically diverse. In addition to the sheer difficulty of making existing homogeneous congregations multicultural by intention, a concern for social justice within overall church structures and empowerment of non-white church members may help explain this apparent irony. Law echoes the need and efficacy of empowering ethnic minority persons in groups rather than as individuals in the North American social context.<sup>39</sup> In United Methodism, the ethnically homogeneous groupings focused upon for empowerment tend to be local churches. For example, in the 2000 Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church, which includes the Social Principles, of nineteen resolutions against racism, only four can be adduced to encourage multiculturalism *within* a given local church.<sup>40</sup> In contrast, “Strengthening the Ethnic-Minority Local Church” is the name given to an official mission priority that was in place on the General and

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<sup>37</sup> Carnegie Samuel Calian, longtime president of the Presbyterian-related Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, quoted in Dart, 8.

<sup>38</sup> John Dart, “Mainline Quietly Effective,” *Christian Century*, 118, No. 11, 4.

<sup>39</sup> See Law’s discussion of high and low power distance cultures, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*, 19-24.

<sup>40</sup> *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2000), 382-418, 384, 394, 409, 417.

Annual Conference levels for more than twelve years. Thus, while multicultural congregations are celebrated, in terms of official writings and policy, there is probably more encouragement and incentive for existing United Methodist congregations to pursue multiethnic ministry through one of the other two models, namely the multi-congregational church or the strategic partnership.

However, Asbury Church should keep in mind the possibility of the multicultural congregation as a strategic model worth working toward in the future. Based on his sobering analysis in *Divided by Faith*, in which he (and co-author Christian Smith) argue not only that white evangelical Protestantism unconsciously helps to perpetuate racial inequities in society, but also that racially segregated worship patterns in general help to perpetuate societal injustice; Michael Emerson subsequently combined with a multiethnic team of researchers to argue a more encouraging thesis in *United by Faith*. They persuasively argue that since segregated worship patterns are not only a symptom of racism, but also help perpetuate racial injustice, intentionally multiracial congregations should be a starting place and a deliberate, spiritually-grounded strategy rather than an ending place for a sustained 21<sup>st</sup> century assault on the inequitable racialization of American society. In their introduction they write, “*Divided by Faith* outlined how separate congregations have a number of negative consequences for racial division and inequality. If this is so, might multiracial congregations have the opposite effect?” They go on to argue that this is the case and interestingly enough, conclude by citing the

heavenly vision of multiracial worship in Revelation 7:9.<sup>41</sup> This concern will be revisited in the conclusion of this chapter and incorporated in Asbury's proposed strategy.

Case Study – A Multicultural Congregation  
Oxon Hill United Methodist Church, Oxon Hill, Maryland<sup>42</sup>

Oxon Hill United Methodist Church originated in 1811 as the Oxon Hill Methodist Meeting House. From its beginning in 1811 until 1946, the small congregation was served by supply, student, or retired pastors on a circuit with other local churches. From 1946 to the present, the church has been served by resident pastors, including Elgar Soper during the mid 1960s. The first female pastor to lead the congregation served from 1992 till 2000. The first African-American pastor to lead the congregation, John Warren, was appointed in 2000 and serves at present. From 1950 through the early 1980s the church membership grew from 183 to a peak of over 1,600. Since the mid 1980s church membership has declined to approximately 700 at present, while worship attendance seems to have stabilized over the past several years at around 200 people, having peaked in the early 1980s at over 500.

Very prominent in Oxon Hill's history, particularly for this study, is its relationship to St. Paul United Methodist Church, an African-American congregation whose building is only several hundred yards away from Oxon Hill's. At present, though Oxon Hill has transitioned from being exclusively white to being self consciously multicultural, the two congregations have little interaction. This has not always been the case.

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<sup>41</sup> Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3, 186.

<sup>42</sup> Information for this case study was received in an interview with the pastor, the Rev. John Warren, August, 2002; from Dwight Johnson, "When White Flight Does Not Include the Church" a D. Min. thesis project, Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington D.C., 2002; and from the church's web site, [www.gbgm-umc.org/oxonhillumc](http://www.gbgm-umc.org/oxonhillumc).

St. Paul U. M. Church, dating back to 1791, and considered to be *the* African-American church for the Oxon Hill area from its inception, remained a relatively small but stable church through the 1970s. Interestingly enough, in the early and mid 1980s it began a period of rapid growth in membership and worship attendance. Membership rose from less than 200 to over 800, average worship attendance from less than 100 to 350. Like Oxon Hill, over the past few years, the statistics have stabilized somewhat, leaving the churches approximately equal in size at present.

During the mid-1960s however, a merger between the two churches was proposed while Elgar Soper was serving the Oxon Hill Church and a white pastor, John Shirkey, was appointed to St Paul. Various shared experiences were undertaken to position the congregations for merger including joint worship services, socials, and combined Vacation Bible Schools. When the vote for merger was taken, St. Paul Church voted overwhelmingly for it, but Oxon Hill members voted it down by a six to five ratio. Soper was so distraught he left Oxon Hill. Since that experience, despite their physical proximity, the two congregations have had little interaction over several decades. As noted earlier, multi-cultural spiritual renewal does not happen by osmosis.

In what seems an obvious God-sized, God-inspired irony, after the merger failure the St. Paul congregation went on to thrive while Oxon Hill eventually began a serious decline. In the latest ironic twist, though, over the past few years, Oxon Hill has now developed into a multi-racial church, its active membership now comprised of persons describing themselves in the following categories: sixty percent Caucasian, twenty percent African-American, fifteen percent Asian-American (predominantly Filipino), and five percent Latino or Native American or other.

The area within a twenty-minute drive of the Oxon Hill Church was once an agricultural region. It is located near the D.C. Capital Beltway south of Washington within two or three miles of the east bank of the Potomac River. Following World War II the area became highly residential. Mirroring the suburban development and “white-flight” housing patterns of other major metropolitan areas in the U. S. during the second half of the twentieth century, the first new occupants in the residential boom were white, but the area has more recently transitioned into a predominantly African-American community, with a significant number of Asian-Americans, particularly persons of Filipino background. Current demographics provide some interesting comparisons with U.S. averages. The population density is high but has been decreasing at a gradual rate. Eighty-seven percent of the populace in the immediate area surrounding the church is African-American, more than seven times the national average. Less than ten percent of the population is Caucasian while the United States average is seventy percent. Finally, the average household income is nearly \$6,000 less than the national average.

Apparently, like many self-described multi-cultural churches, the congregation did not make multi-culturalism their goal, but having realized an ethnically and racially diverse congregation, they celebrate it. When asked how the church transitioned from being racially homogeneous to heterogeneous, the current pastor, John Warren, could not pinpoint a specific cause, but he surmised the process began in earnest under the pastorate of his predecessor, Sandra S. W. Taylor. Apparently, she and congregational leaders did some strategic planning and, no doubt looking at the area’s demographic data compared with their congregation’s demographics, came to the conclusion: change or perish. One can only imagine that during the 1990s church members began to be more

intentional about inviting their African-American and Asian-American acquaintances and co-workers to church, or at least, African- and Asian- Americans who were not necessarily looking for a distinctively African-American or Asian-American church experience found a warm welcome at Oxon Hill. However it happened, the congregation warmly embraces diversity as an important part of their identity now. For instance, on the church's denominational web page, they are self-described as "a multi-cultural church welcoming all persons, who seek Christ with OPEN HEARTS, OPEN MINDS, AND OPEN DOORS." The "open hearts, open minds, open doors" portion of the quote is part of a denomination-wide communication campaign for 2000-2004, but the total description provides an unmistakable reminder of how the congregation wishes to see itself.

The present pastor, John Warren, describes himself as an African American coming out of an Anglo-Catholic background.<sup>43</sup> He is described by a colleague as being a good leader who likes to be in control but who does not micromanage committees or staff, and he seems to be well regarded by the congregation. He leads Oxon Hill's worship services, which are described as being more Euro-American in style than anything else, with an interesting mix of "high-church" formality and personable enthusiasm.

Despite the obvious ethnic and racial diversity of the Oxon Hill Church, it does appear there is a certain homogeneity among a majority of the congregation around socio-economic class. It does not appear that the middle to upper middle class persona of

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<sup>43</sup> This kind of multi-cultural background may make him well suited for multi-ethnic ministry. Contrast his background to that of Rodney Woo, pastor of a multicultural church in Houston, Texas, "His father is half-Chinese, he grew up in an African-American neighborhood, and his wife is Hispanic," described in Dart, "Hues in the Pews," 6.

the congregation has markedly changed along with the racial and ethnic diversity.<sup>44</sup>

Apparently many of the members have an employment history in the military, public education, or large health-care institutions, though it is uncertain exactly how much of the congregation this comprises.<sup>45</sup> The military and public education, professionally speaking, are two of the better integrated segments in our society. It is not surprising that many persons of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds who have found a reasonable level of comfort and success in these “multicultural” environments would also prefer a church family with similar diversity. Oxon Hill United Methodist Church is to be commended for providing an effective welcome to such persons.

Thus, of the three biblical principles that highlight the expected multi-ethnic character of revival, it appears that Oxon Hill Church experiences a little foretaste of Rev. 5:9 every Sunday. If they did not, they would not celebrate their diversity so much. It also seems that the new social reality in Christ advocated in Gal. 3:28 is being experienced in a number of ways. As Dwight Johnson observes, “Leadership is well divided along gender and racial lines, which seems to be done quite intentionally and appears to be working out very well. The atmosphere is friendly and warm, albeit in a reserved kind of way, and there does not seem to be any open tension or factiousness within the church.” It does not appear that any individuals or categories of persons are being treated as second class citizens in this fellowship. As regards the final biblical principle in view here, the empowerment of the relatively powerless in the gospels, this

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<sup>44</sup> See J Timothy Ahlen and J. V. Thomas, *One Church, Many Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 82-83, and the reference to studies on the relative limits on socioeconomic diversity within most American congregations.

<sup>45</sup> Note the similarities between the Oxon Hill church and the Catholic congregation noted in Winter, “Multicultural Parishes,” *America*, 174, No. 2, 8, above (See Footnote 31). These include the ethnic mix of the congregation and the work related background of at least some parishioners in education and the military.



does not appear to be a particularly strong emphasis at Oxon Hill. While social justice seems to be effectively practiced within the church fellowship, how the church could foster racial reconciliation with justice beyond its walls is most likely something the congregation will explore more in the future. The pastor reports that Eric Law (often referred to in this study) is coming soon to lead a workshop at the church. It will be interesting to see what effect his work has and what the future holds for this multi-cultural congregation's inner life as well as its outreach.

### The Multicongregational Church Model

The second strategic aim or model existing congregations can consider is the multicongregational church. This refers to a local church that supports homogeneous groups and ministries within a local church organization or structure. It can take the form of an existing ethnically homogeneous congregation sharing its facility with a homogeneous congregation of a different ethnicity. It can also take the form of a local church creating an umbrella organization to manage one or more ethnically homogeneous faith communities the original congregation plants through outreach into its surrounding community. J. Timothy Ahlen and J. V. Thomas detail how to organize and facilitate such an effort through what they call the Key Church Strategy.<sup>46</sup>

First, how well does the multicongregational church fulfill the heavenly vision of multiethnic worship in Revelation? The answer to this depends on how much the homogeneous congregations within the overall structure interact and on what basis. If the worship life of the various ethnically homogeneous units never intersects, then once again, the spirit of Revelation 5:9 doesn't seem to be fulfilled. On the one hand, one

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<sup>46</sup> J. Timothy Ahlen and J. V. Thomas, *One Church, Many Congregations: The Key Church Strategy*, Ministry for the Third Millennium, ed. Lyle E. Schaller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

might legitimately ask, “Just because the separate worshiping units are under one umbrella, if the worship is still largely segregated, how does this fulfill the heavenly vision of Revelation any more than do separate, unaffiliated congregations of differing ethnic identities?” On the other hand, if the organizational umbrella helps the various congregations come together on a periodic basis for joint worship services, it could be argued that this arrangement facilitates a significant step in the direction of fulfilling the vision of Revelation, especially if these services happen on a frequent basis. Such worship experiences could be seen as a foretaste of the heavenly vision – perhaps an “already” element in a still sinful world that is “not yet” able to experience the fullness of Revelation 5:9. Perhaps occasional, but periodic multicultural, multiethnic, multiracial worship experiences are all we can expect in this fallen world until the consummation of the Kingdom. Again, using the fruit imagery of chapter two, the multicongregational church would be like a single fruit plate with dividers separating the various kinds of fruit. The extent to which the flavors intermingled may depend on the detailed construction of the fruit plate itself.

Likewise, a similar analysis can be applied to the question, “How well does the multicongregational local church fulfill the new social reality in Christ presented in the epistles?” Again, it depends on how much the separate congregations interact and on what basis. If they continue to remain essentially separate, except for representation within the organizational structure, with little or no opportunity to have fellowship around food and spiritual nurture and mission outreach, then there would be little opportunity to live out the spirit of Gal. 3:28. If any group were segregated in such a way as to be relegated to second class citizen status among the whole, then this would be

contrary to the expected multiethnic character of revival. However, if the organizational design facilitates regular opportunities, not only for fellowship within the homogeneous units, but across them as well, it could be argued once again that this is taking the formerly separate groups a significant step closer to the vision reflected in the early New Testament faith communities.

Finally, applying the social justice inherent in the gospels to the multicongregational local church model, a similar caveat emerges. It depends on how the perceived power of the various groups is distributed and shared within the organizational design and interactions. Assuming Law's analysis is correct, if one of the ethnic groups is caucasian, there is a high likelihood that this group will dominate the other groups, even if it does so unconsciously. If newly started ethnic minority groups or congregations end up becoming independent local churches in order to escape this subtle oppression, it is difficult to see how the cause of biblical justice either within the church or in society at large is well served. However, in the organizational design, and in the manner in which it is carried out, if concepts such as Law's "cycle of gospel living" and "mutual invitation"<sup>47</sup> could be practiced, the potential for a foretaste--glimpses in reality if you will--of a biblically just, multiethnic community could be quite high. If the multicongregational church is to have any credibility in effecting social justice in the society beyond its walls, it seems it would need to operate this way. Again, if the church simply mirrors subtly unjust practices taking place in the world around it, how can it hope to have any effect on societal transformation in this area? The maintaining of culturally distinct groups, however, would provide for the "ease" that Law indicates may still be

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<sup>47</sup> Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*, 74, 79-88.

necessary for many people of color in the North American milieu.<sup>48</sup> Ideally, the cultural experience in the local church would be of a back and forth pattern. There would be ample time to “relax” and “retreat” and be “at home” in the accustomed cultural grouping, but also ample time to interact and stretch and grow in the more stressful multicultural settings.

Some practical observations about the multicongregational church model may help congregations decide whether the model is appropriate for them. First, in many cases, the model works! Ahlen and Thomas cite nine case studies of local churches that have practiced precisely this model with considerable success.<sup>49</sup> An aforementioned web site cites six other examples.<sup>50</sup> Practically-minded Lyle Schaller highly recommends this model. In fact, he edited the book series in which *One Church, Many Congregations* was published.

Second, however, the model seems most well-suited to independent churches or those that practice a congregational form of church polity. The assumption is that most of these multicongregational churches became multicongregational by taking the initiative to cross a cultural barrier and develop a new faith community that did not exist previously. These multicongregational churches are not created by outfitting an organizational design around already existing churches of differing ethnicities. While the Key Church organizational design may resemble what is known as a cluster or cooperative parish or a multichurch pastoral charge in United Methodism, it generally develops through one church planting new churches, fellowships, and ministries, not by yoking together already existing groups. However, it seems there is no reason a single

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<sup>48</sup> Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*, 80.

<sup>49</sup> Ahlen and Thomas, 135-148.

<sup>50</sup> D. J. Chuang, [www.dichuang.com/multiethnic.htm](http://www.dichuang.com/multiethnic.htm).

United Methodist congregation could not plant one or more new congregations cross-culturally and then request that the resulting groups, together with the original congregation, be organized as a cluster, parish, or charge.

A third observation involves the kind of multicongregational church where one congregation simply donates or rents physical space to a congregation of another race, ethnicity, or culture. Dart states the observation plainly. It does not work. “Three strategies for building a diverse congregation rarely work: a church merger, renting space to smaller ethnic congregations, or placing ethnic congregations under one roof with occasional joint services.”<sup>51</sup> The manner in which these congregations relate to one another is crucial. Physical proximity of persons of differing ethnicities in the same building or organizational structure does not guarantee that the expected concomitants of spiritual renewal and multiethnic ministry will spontaneously erupt. Multicultural spiritual renewal does not happen by osmosis.

In contrast, the final observation is that local churches that have developed into multicongregational churches have more intentionality than a vague physical or organizational proximity. What they share is a missional vision that is intentionally evangelistic and multicultural. Unlike some multicultural congregations that seem to wake up one morning and realize that they are multicultural, multicongregational churches develop because someone intentionally targets an indigenous group of people, makes contact cross-culturally, and plants a new faith community in that setting. Void of this intentionally evangelistic, intentionally multicultural vision, multicongregational churches are not likely to develop. Therefore, churches unwilling to adopt such a missional vision should not choose the model as a strategic aim.

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<sup>51</sup> Dart, “Hues in the Pews,” 7.

In the case of Asbury Church's ongoing cemetery response and its pursuit of racial reconciliation, the thought of intentionally birthing a new, distinct African-American congregation absent a partnership with the already-existing Centennial or Bethel congregations would be insensitive and unthinkable. In addition, as explained in chapter one, during the 1970s and 1980s Asbury and Centennial were yoked in a form of multicongregational church. Centennial ended up requesting release from this arrangement in order to receive its own appointed pastor. For these reasons, the multicongregational church model may not be a promising initial strategy for adoption by Asbury United Methodist Church.

#### Case Study – A Multicongregational Church Wesley and Betel United Methodist Churches, Georgetown, Delaware<sup>52</sup>

The relationship between Wesley United Methodist Church, Georgetown, Delaware, and the Betel United Methodist congregation could be described as a multicongregational church, more in the sense of shared space and physical proximity than in the sense of organizational umbrella. It does not fit all the characteristics of the Key Church strategy. Wesley Church dates back to the 1770s, as do many of the United Methodist congregations in this area. It is located in Georgetown, current population between 4,000 and 5,000, which is the county seat of Sussex County, Delaware. For most of its history, the church has been yoked with one or more other congregations served by one pastor. For the past few years, though, it has been a station church (the only church served by a full time pastor). The past ten years have seen a slight decrease in overall membership, now standing at about 475, and a stable average worship attendance, approximately 125.

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<sup>52</sup> Information for this case study was provided by an interview with Richard Comly, Church Council Chair of Wesley United Methodist Church, August, 2002.

As in nearly all communities on the Delmarva Peninsula, there has been a significant minority population of African-Americans in the Georgetown area since the days of slavery. It is not known whether blacks were ever welcome in worship in the eighteenth century Wesley Church. Nevertheless the Wesley congregation has always been a predominantly white church served by white pastors. Around the early 1990s, the number of Hispanic immigrants moving to what is known as the Route 113 corridor in the east-central section of the county rose dramatically, with the largest influx happening in the Georgetown area. A large number of these Spanish-speaking people were immigrants from Guatemala, working for low wages as laborers in the local poultry industry. The present residential area within walking distance of Wesley Church is approximately fifty percent Hispanic, ten percent African-American, and forty percent caucasian.

Taking note of this large influx of Spanish-speaking immigrants, the Dover District of the United Methodist Church<sup>53</sup> set up the Dover District Hispanic Ministries Task Force. Eventually, this group obtained the services of a Spanish-speaking ministerial candidate named Rene Knight and supported the formation of an Hispanic faith community. Approximately seven or eight years ago, Palmer Clarke, the pastor of Wesley Church at the time and a member of the task force, approached the governing body of the congregation about allowing the new Spanish-speaking group to hold worship services in Wesley's Fellowship Hall. (Interestingly enough, Rene is black by race and Caribbean by ethnicity, helping to make the group that gathers with him for worship and fellowship, now known as Betel, multiracial, multiethnic, and Hispanic all at

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<sup>53</sup> Comprised of approximately one hundred local churches with seventy pastors in two southern Delaware counties.

once.) The Wesley congregation agreed to the proposal and saw it primarily as an outreach ministry to the Hispanics of the area. Wesley and Betel continued sharing space with a modest agreement – first involving the fellowship hall and then the sanctuary – until Betel moved into their own building earlier this year.

When asked about the effects of the arrangement with Betel on Wesley Church, Wesley's Church Council Chair Rich Comly stated he was "not so sure there was much spiritual growth" as a result, though there were several positive outcomes. These included the positive contact that was provided with people of another culture, which children of both churches especially seemed to enjoy, and the unexpected benefit of receiving financial gifts from the Betel congregation that far exceeded Wesley's expectations, considering they were taking this on as a mission project. The two groups started out having joint worship services or coffee hours at least once a year, but the overall contact was "not as much as anticipated," language presenting a significant barrier. Thus the heavenly vision of multiethnic worship or the new, multiethnic, social-reality in Christ do not appear to have been significantly realized by this arrangement. However, by sharing its facilities, the Wesley congregation did choose voluntarily to give up some power in a significant way to a group of far less powerful Christians of a different ethnicity. Real estate is a powerful means of socioeconomic leverage in this society. There was a sacrificial element to the arrangement for Wesley Church, seen in the fact that it cost the congregation some energy working through the inevitable conflicts that arose from sharing space. In addition, one wealthy member was so opposed to the idea that she reduced an intended bequest to Wesley Church by half.



Thus, for a period of time, Wesley Church helped empower a group of fellow believers across racial and ethnic lines with dignity and grace. Who knows what seeds of revival their action will have planted for the future.

### The Strategic Partnership Model

The third model to be examined for promoting spiritual renewal through racial reconciliation is the strategic partnership. This refers to a situation in which two or more already existing churches of differing ethnicities choose to work together on a specific project or projects. The projects could include Bible studies, worship or fellowship events, or mission outreach activities. The participating congregations reach some agreement to cooperate, which may or may not be formalized into a written covenant.

The analysis of this model in light of the expected multiethnic characteristics of revival is quite similar to the analysis of the multicongregational church. To what extent does the strategic partnership fulfill the heavenly vision of multiethnic worship expressed in the book of Revelation? This depends on the frequency and quality of the joint worship experiences the participating congregations develop. Obviously, if shared worship is not included in the partnership, then the spirit of Revelation 5:9 has little chance of being experienced. Like the multicongregational church, however, if the strategic partnership includes a shared worship element, these experiences could be seen as a foretaste or preview of the multiethnic heavenly vision, a foretaste, perhaps, of “fruit salad.” Similarly, the frequency and quality of fellowship or mission outreach activities will dictate to what extent the partnership mirrors the new social reality in Christ described in the epistles. If the power-sharing concerns and practical suggestions offered by Law were to be used (whether consciously or unconsciously), the potential for a

strategic partnership to develop a genuine New Testament *koinonia* seems quite high. Finally, when applying the concern for social justice inherent in the gospels to this model, one finds the same weaknesses and potential strengths as were evident in the multicongregational church model. The credibility and effectiveness of still-ethnically-segregated congregations in combating ethnic and racial injustice in the society at large remains a troubling issue for the Body of Christ in the twenty-first century. However, if congregational leaders intentionally bring this concern “to the table” from the beginning of the partnership, it seems the strategic partnership model could be “a step in the right direction.” Despite what may be tired clichés, it surely is preferable to simply ignoring the anticipated multiethnic character of biblical revival and maintaining the status quo.

A practical observation in choosing this model, especially for mainline congregations, is that it has been tried in various ways over the years. This is particularly true for United Methodist congregations in the mid-Atlantic area. Congregational leaders considering this model may well find themselves feeling or encountering a “been there, done that, got the tee-shirt” attitude. The prominence of civil rights concerns during the second half of the twentieth century had a significant impact on both the mainline church and society at large. Many interactions and experiments among previously ethnically homogeneous congregations were attempted during this era, including Asbury and Centennial’s “shared pastor” period in the 1970s and 1980s. Though unsupported by data, it may be assumed that many of these efforts were guided by a philosophy which said in effect, “Let’s just put people of different ethnicities and cultures together in various ways and hope for the best” (pulpit exchanges, fellowship dinners, Bible studies and the like). As noted previously, multicultural spiritual renewal does not happen by

osmosis. However, to reiterate, using guidelines like those developed by Law to manage and monitor cross-cultural interactions “up front” could prove invaluable and could help congregations avoid mistakes made in any less than successful, non-sustaining cross-racial congregational partnerships of the past. Peart’s analysis could also prove invaluable in avoiding past mistakes if this model is chosen.

A second practical observation about the strategic partnership model, however, is more encouraging. Where it has been successful, unexpected spiritual benefits and new ministries have blossomed from the relationships built around shared activities that were relatively modest as originally conceived. This is well illustrated in the case study that follows.

Case Study – A Strategic Partnership  
Eastwick United Methodist Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania<sup>54</sup>  
First United Methodist Church of Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania

Eastwick United Methodist Church is a predominantly African-American congregation meeting in southwest Philadelphia a mile or two north of the Philadelphia International Airport. It is an active congregation with numerous fellowship and community outreach programs. Average worship attendance is approximately 170 and presumably growing. The church is currently in the process of purchasing a nearby 12,000 square foot building, with plans to lease part of it out and use part of it to house its ministries of worship, education, and community outreach.

Some time within the past two years, Charles Cole, then pastor of the First United Methodist Church of Fairless Hills, located in a community just north east of

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<sup>54</sup> Information for this case study was taken from a video and written material provided by Eastwick United Methodist Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and an interview with the Reverend Helen Stafford Fleming, the church’s pastor, August, 2002. Information was not available from the Fairless Hills church.

Philadelphia, approached Eastwick's pastor, Helen Fleming, about doing a spiritual leadership workshop called "The Tool Kit" at his church. Apparently, the two pastors agreed to work together to offer spiritual leadership training sessions to a group consisting of persons from both congregations. At present, the spiritual leadership classes continue every first and third Thursday of each month, meeting back and forth at both locations. Lay partnerships consisting of an Eastwick person and a Fairless Hills person now help lead the classes. Though they might not be conscious of it, the manner in which the pastors set up the classes and have shared leadership with lay teams is a living example of Law's "mutual invitation" technique.

The effects of this continuing series of classes upon both congregations can only be described as reviving. When denominational officials asked Fleming to reopen a church that had been closed for six months in nearby Sharon Hill, at her invitation members of the Fairless Hills congregation volunteered to help with this church planting venture in a multicultural, multiethnic community. The new congregation was launched in September 2001. Though it is unclear whether Fairless Hills members will become weekly participants of the new Sharon Hill congregation, Fleming reports that average worship attendance stands at fifteen to forty-five people, consisting primarily of African Americans, more recent African and Jamaican immigrants, and "one or two white people." Fleming called the community surrounding Sharon Hill a "racist area," no doubt referring to racial tensions experienced in this transitioning, multicultural neighborhood. One can only hope and pray the spiritual vitality and outreach of the new congregation will help foster racial reconciliation with justice in the community at large.

What one cannot miss in the Eastwick and Fairless Hills story is the flesh and blood living out of the three biblical principles highlighting the normative multiethnic character of biblical revival. There is a worship element of the classes that clearly anticipates Rev. 5:9. Participants speak of singing together and praying for one another with anointing by oil. Descriptions of the fellowship experienced are reminiscent of the new social reality in Christ described in the epistles. Many cross-racial friendships have developed and extend beyond the class sessions. Some members now talk on the phone at least once a week.<sup>55</sup> Consider these testimonies offered by Fairless Hills members:

This course has truly been a blessing to me. I have never before been involved in an extended spiritual relationship of this magnitude with people of another race. For the first time in my life, I can fully embrace the fact that we are all one in Christ. Praise God from whom all blessing flow!

Participating in sharing with Sharon Hill (and Eastwick) Church has made me even more aware that we are all children of the same God. We have the same feelings and emotions about things. Why did we take so long to get to know each other and share our love?

One also hears in testimonies offered by Eastwick members echoes of Law's Cycle of Gospel Living with its inherent new distribution of perceived power. These members share initial reluctance and fearful expectation that they may be hurt or knocked down one more time in interactions with white people (though they express this with considerable tact). What they end up doing is eloquently describing the reviving work of the Holy Spirit in not ignoring the uneven perceived power dynamics of the mixed race group, but instead in transcending them and releasing in the people the absolute joy of racial reconciliation with justice.

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<sup>55</sup> Recall Piper's "hang out together after hours" comment related to Rev. 5:9 in "God's Pursuit of Racial Diversity at Infinite Cost," (Minneapolis, January 14, 2001), a sermon preached at Bethlehem Baptist Church. [cited 10 Jan. 2007]. Online: [www.soundofgrace.com/piper/2001/01-14-01](http://www.soundofgrace.com/piper/2001/01-14-01); see above, chapter 2.

I was somewhat reluctant to want to participate in the Spiritual Leadership training at first. I had been through a number of cultural sensitivity, race, Black-White, training sessions on the corporate side. I found that in these kinds of sessions I ended up giving a lot and opening up but the others did not do the same. Well God, not the corporate president, met us during our Spiritual Leadership sessions. God is Love. For me, it was truly Love at first sight with my Brothers and Sisters from Fairless Hills. Despite the differences in the way we walk, the way we talk, and the way we eat (that started to come closer together), Pastor Fleming and Pastor Cole taught us that we all shared something greater, something deeper, which was God's Love and the Love of Jesus Christ. We truly love and accept each other as Christ accepts us (Romans 15:7).

The Spiritual Leadership Classes were rewarding and life changing. To be honest, I had many preconceived notions regarding this particular class because of the differences among the group. Neither group knew what to expect from the other. Although there are many differences among the group, we share one common ground – "Jesus The Christ." We're many members, but one body.

From the beginning God would not have separation among this group. We became one in Christ. From day one, God tore down the walls that had been built over the years from negative incidents that occurred in our lives. Forgiveness, understanding, and respect moved into us. Then the love of God flowed from heart to heart. Deliverance took place and we became fit to be used by God. Nine months of teachings deposited. Everyone became pregnant with the things of God, and started moving in their gifts and anointing. God was free to move.

Last, but not least, it was an honor and a privilege to be a part of this group. It was a life changing experience for me. I can truly say the First UMC of Fairless Hills family are my brothers and sisters in Christ. I expect many more miracles to come.

In conclusion, it seems something of an understatement: this strategic partnership between the Eastwick and Fairless Hills churches is a shining example of spiritual renewal through racial reconciliation.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the above analysis, in response to the re-discovery of its historic African-American cemetery, the most promising strategy for Asbury Church, Smyrna, for promoting spiritual renewal through repentance and racial reconciliation is to pursue a strategic partnership including Centennial United Methodist Church, and if possible,

Bethel AME Church. The strong potential for making tangible the biblical principles established herein while taking into account the historical strengths and vulnerabilities already mentioned, together with practical observations such as ease of implementation and the congregations' shared 19<sup>th</sup> century history with the cemetery, long-established independent identities, and close physical proximity, all combine to point unmistakably in this direction.

Also for aforementioned reasons, the *Steps to Wholeness* study would be the most promising resource for the strategic partnership to utilize initially, while all other resources mentioned should be kept in view. Also kept in view should be the possibility that, like the Eastwick and Fairless Hills congregations, the strategic partnership could one day birth a new, intentionally multiracial congregation, experiencing to an even richer degree the spiritual revival and racial reconciliation inherent in the theology.

The final chapter in this thesis project will describe and analyze Asbury Church's actual experience internally and with the other congregations in formulating and carrying out these recommendations from the time of the cemetery re-discovery to the present.

## CHAPTER FIVE THEOLOGY MADE TANGIBLE

*“Differences don’t have to make a difference.”*

*--Joyceann Chandler,  
(member of Centennial Church, and  
participant in the Steps Toward Wholeness study)*

Having established the potential practicality and appropriateness of a biblically-supported, historically-sensitive theology of spiritual renewal through repentance and racial reconciliation to the case at hand; this thesis-project proposed a primary resource and congregational model for making tangible the theology. Using descriptive analysis, it will be argued in this final chapter that the strategy has been applied successfully and the theology lived out in a preliminary but authentic way. This has been accomplished primarily through a joint study of *Steps to Wholeness* by persons from Asbury and Centennial churches, their two congregations’ subsequent acceptance of a recommended strategic partnership, and Asbury’s official acceptance of a recommendation to engage in a public “Act of Repentance” at the time of the cemetery rededication. It will be shown that in these activities, events, and decisions and the process surrounding them, persons have begun to experience concomitant spiritual renewal and racial reconciliation.

### ***The Steps Toward Wholeness: Learning and Repentance Study Group***

As is indicated in the appended timeline, almost a year elapsed between the time of the



rediscovery of the historic African American cemetery in June of 2005 and Centennial and Asbury's embarking on the *Steps Toward Wholeness* study in May of 2006.<sup>1</sup> A description of intervening events will help put the joint-study in context.

Following June 2005 newspaper coverage of the grave sites' discovery and their linkage to Asbury Church, including reporters raising unanswered, potentially embarrassing questions regarding Asbury's role; the church's own documents relating to the 1976 sale were examined and their contents shared internally with Asbury's own congregational leaders in July. These documents, all from the mid-1970s included permission from the state of Delaware to relocate the cemetery, the commercial appraisal of the land as construction-appropriate, the deed of sale to the American Legion, and the codicil indicating only grave markers had been removed and acknowledging responsibility to relocate any subsequently discovered graves during any future construction. Later that month, these documents also were shared privately with leaders of Bethel and Centennial churches. Asbury's senior pastor and lay member of annual conference met with Bethel's Pastor and lay leader. Asbury's Senior Pastor met with Centennial's pastor, a second-career seminary student who had just been appointed as of July 1, and apprised him privately of the situation the following day.

On August 3, 2005, Asbury held a Charge Conference<sup>2</sup> at which it passed a resolution appointing a team consisting of the senior pastor and the chairpersons of the Trustees and Cemetery Team to represent the congregation's interests and responsibilities in discussions with any parties relating to the cemetery. The church also committed itself

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<sup>1</sup> See below, Appendix 1.

<sup>2</sup> A Charge Conference meeting is an official congregational meeting, normally held only once a year, at which major decisions affecting the church are undertaken: election of officers, property matters, etc. Additional sessions of the Charge Conference can also be called with permission of the District Superintendent for necessary and important matters. This was felt to be one of those times.

to inviting officials from Centennial and Bethel churches to be present at any formal negotiations of which it was a part regarding the matter, signaling an inherent attempt to repent from their failure to do so in the decisions surrounding 1976.<sup>3</sup>

In the meantime, immediately upon the rediscovery of the graves in June, the state of Delaware's Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs had begun an investigation into the matter as is required by the state law that now governs the discovery of unmarked gravesites. This work included examining the site from an archeological perspective in order to identify the dating, number, and location of graves, as well as searching for next-of-kin to those presumed to have been buried there. In continuing application of the law, working with the City of Smyrna, state officials have to date identified ten next-of-kin of those buried at the site, have developed a formal Disposition and Treatment Plan in which the gravesites would remain in place and be marked by an historical marker and a single memorial monument, and have proposed a Preservation Covenant which would require any and all present and future owners of the site to maintain it as a cemetery. There are still matters pending regarding the Preservation Covenant as will be discussed below.

However, when the pastors of Bethel and Centennial churches initially met with Asbury's pastor in respective meetings to discuss the situation in July, a copy of the *Steps Toward Wholeness* study was shared with them for review with the suggestion that persons from the three churches could possibly engage in the study together at some future date. With Centennial's recent pastoral transition and fall Bible study schedules already in place at all three churches, no date was set and no firm commitment actually to doing the study was made, only an agreement to look over the material and consider it for

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<sup>3</sup> See below, Appendix 3, for the Resolution adopted by the Charge Conference.

the future. As busy, active month followed busy, active month; partly perhaps giving testimony to the centrifugal-like forces mentioned in chapter four, outwardly propelling congregations into homogenous, non-connecting spheres of activity; it was late winter of 2006 before the pastors of Asbury and Centennial sat down again to discuss the possibility of doing the study together. At that meeting, sensing time was of the essence, they set consecutive Thursday evenings in May and early June to complete the five-chapter study, with the understanding that the pastor and members of Bethel Church also would be invited to participate. Bethel's pastor was then contacted by phone and at his request, by follow-up memo, but they chose not to participate in this initial May 2006 study group.

The Pastors agreed to invite a limited and roughly balanced number of persons from the two congregations to participate in the study in order to facilitate discussion and sharing. Therefore, an open invitation was not extended. Members of Asbury's Barnabas Team had already been apprised of the possibilities inherent in this study and a new strategic partnership across racial lines, and three of them had expressed interest in participating.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Asbury's associate pastor and two other members of the Church Council were invited to participate. Only one declined, citing scheduling conflicts that would have caused him to miss a majority of the sessions. Likewise, Centennial's pastor invited approximately seven persons to participate including several long-term members in leadership positions as well as some newer members; six Centennial members attended a majority of the sessions. The attempted size and balance of the overall group was largely achieved in that attendance at the sessions averaged ten with never less than four participants from one of the churches, not counting the pastors.

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<sup>4</sup> This team is responsible for promoting new ministries in and through the church.

In addition, though not necessarily by intention, the group was roughly balanced in terms of male and female participants, and consisted of adults fairly well distributed in age ranging from their mid-thirties to mid-seventies.

The fact that study participants experienced the theology argued herein made tangible can be seen in five areas of observation. These include observations of an early “fruit salad” discussion, comments from participants’ written evaluations, how the group wrestled with the concept of repentance, the use of the “mutual invitation” technique, and the frequent expressions of the necessity for intentionality voiced at the study’s conclusion.

Early on in the process, participants were asked to “begin with the end in mind” regarding their hopes and aspirations for what the study might help facilitate. They were asked to consider toward what kind of relationship Centennial and Asbury *should* strive. They were invited to contemplate the spiritual fruit that Centennial and Asbury together offer the greater community around them, and asked, “What does such fruit look like now and what *should* we be offering the world around us: marmalade, fruit salad, or separate bowls of different kinds of fruit?” Obviously considering marmalade or fruit salad to involve the assimilation of the smaller Centennial congregation into the larger Asbury congregation with a corresponding loss (or obliteration) of African-American cultural expression, one Centennial participant responded with quiet resolve, “Reverend, that’s just not going to happen.” Another Centennial participant observed, “Right now, it seems like we’re separate bowls of fruit in whole different restaurants. If we could just get on the same salad bar, or same serving tray, that would be huge.” In a subsequent session, when brainstorming possible areas of cooperation in a strategic partnership, the same

participant who earlier said, “that’s not going to happen,” looked at the white-board with a wide range of activities listed and said, with conviction, “If we could do all those things together, ummh, who knows what could happen?” Though not steered in this direction, by the end of the study, as recommended in chapter four herein, participants had decided together that a strategic partnership was the best place to begin for Asbury and Centennial to move simultaneously toward a Revelation 5:9-reflective vision.

At the end of the study, participants were invited to fill out an evaluation instrument that asked questions linked to the three biblical principles explained in chapter two herein that help establish spiritual revival and racial reconciliation as expected concomitants. Though this instrument was not constructed or administered in a way to make it scientifically significant, participants who used it did describe actual experiences of concomitant spiritual renewal and racial reconciliation. Four evaluation responses were received, one from a Centennial member and three from Asbury members. Reflecting their expectations about Jesus’ ethic of social justice, all four felt that the two congregations now would be “somewhat” or “much” better able to live out Jesus’ ethic. Reflecting expectations regarding Asbury and Centennial’s shared worship vision, one participant felt the congregations would now be “slightly” closer to the heavenly vision, one felt they would be “somewhat” closer, and two “much closer” to the heavenly vision as a result of the study. Reflecting expectations regarding their shared social reality, all four indicated they thought Centennial and Asbury now would be “somewhat” closer to a Galatians 3:28 ideal. Finally, regarding their own spiritual lives, all four respondents indicated that their own spiritual life had been “much” or “somewhat” strengthened.

At least one Asbury participant found the study group a safe and supportive environment to consider individual racial attitudes without feeling “attacked” as a European American.

I experienced an opportunity to listen and hear people’s actual experiences. The impact is different than reading about faceless people. I also learned that I do harbor some prejudices in spite of my protestations to the contrary. Overall, I feel this was a very worthwhile exercise and hopefully one that can be repeated to involve more of the people at both Asbury and Centennial.

Participants were invited to express any insights they gained and their hopes for the future as a result of their experience in this study. A Centennial member, though perhaps unaware of it, expresses her or his inherent understanding of Wesleyan theology’s link between social and personal sanctification on the one hand, and the casting off of racism on the other: “There is one God. We all serve the same God. We are all his children and we need to become more pleasing to our God. Let go of the worldly thoughts and become the children God wants us to be. Racism is not part of God Character.”

The way in which the group wrestled with the concept of repentance also demonstrated a tangible experience of the theology of racial reconciliation. After making connections from the study’s depiction of African Americans’ experience within Methodism overall to the experience of African- and European-American Methodists in Smyrna relative to the rediscovered cemetery; participants were presented with a proposed listing of specific attitudes and actions from which Asbury needed to repent, a specific attitude everyone should adopt, and actions Asbury singly, or Asbury and Centennial together ought to adopt. In other words, a simple proposal of specific attitudes *away* from which to repent (bathwater to throw away, as it were) and new attitudes and actions *toward* which to repent were proposed in a manner consistent with

the understanding of corporate, specific, future-action-oriented repentance described in chapter two herein. A “specific attitude” from which to repent was identified as the attitude which assumed that “African-American gravesites were less worthy of recognition and upkeep as European-American gravesites.” Actions from which to repent were identified as “removal (and disposal?) of remaining grave markers (1930s—1970?) and sale of property (1976) to the American Legion without consulting the African-American community (including Bethel AME, Centennial UM congregations).” The question marks included in some parenthetical items were deliberate because of honest lack of knowledge about the exact facts. And yet Asbury could consider expressing a public repentance away from the specific racially insensitive, unjust actions that were known, not in order to scapegoat anyone, but to make public assurance, especially to the African-American community that such attitudes and actions would never again be adopted.

What participants experienced in this discussion was a healing release. Centennial members expressed an appreciation of the thought of a public act of repentance as they envisioned it being directed toward the African-American community as a whole and the Next-of-Kin in particular. Asbury members felt gratified at the manner in which Centennial members did not envision this public act as accompanied by angry demands for restitution or punitive reparations. Subsequent experience with those outside the church community would demonstrate that such retributive sentiment certainly exists to a certain degree. Instead participants emphasized the need to invest in and restore the area’s dignity as sacred ground. Whereas Asbury participants may have expected a harsher response and appreciated the graciousness with which Centennial folk

even discussed the matter, Centennial participants expressed appreciation that anybody in the European American community would express such repentance publicly as they had learned after countless life-experiences never to count on such an apology. Even as the possibility of an act of repentance was being discussed, group members seemed to experience a taste of restorative justice's uplifting flavor – just a taste perhaps, but consistent with a much greater restorative justice that Desmond Tutu and others have described.

A practical way in which study group participants experienced the theology of racial reconciliation being made tangible was through the use of the “mutual invitation” technique. Group members from both congregations commented on the fact that participation in the discussions was well balanced among all the members. Any expectation that European Americans would tend naturally to dominate the discussion did not seem to materialize. Though this may not have been a troublesome issue anyway, the mutual invitation format for responding to discussion questions was used and helped establish a pattern where everyone was invited though not required to respond and while one person shared, everyone else listened intently. Although it also may have been helpful that the pastors tended to choose persons for this initial study group who already possessed these positive communication skills, it was nonetheless encouraging to experience this thorough level of participation.

A final way in which the theology came to life was observed in comments made by participants on the night of the final session. Over and over study group members expressed the hope that what had begun in the study would not “fizzle out” or “get dropped.” “Hope” and “continue” were words heard often. There was both hope and



warning in these near unanimous expressions. “I believe and hope our two congregations can follow up on the five specific goals we listed,” wrote one participant. “My hope is that Asbury/Centennial can form a relationship that could serve as an example to follow throughout the conference,” said another. The need for others across the two congregations also to experience the “balanced small group” approach was mentioned often. Inherent in these overwhelmingly positive comments, though, was also a fear. As if giving testimony again to their acknowledgment of the incessant, demonic, centrifugal-like forces that have kept their communities unequally segregated by race for so long, within Methodism just as much as within the society at large, persons were warning one another that these forces would be hard to resist.

### **Strategic Partnership Beginnings**

Fortunately, one outcome of the *Steps Toward Wholeness* study was an initial mechanism to encourage accountability for the two congregations to continue living out the theology persons experienced together in the small, temporary group. They established a recommendation to be considered by their respective church councils that the two congregations enter into a strategic partnership consisting of five kinds of shared, periodic activities. These activities would include programs of shared worship, fellowship activities, mission activities, small group studies, and pulpit exchanges. Though the study group recommendation only included these five broad categories of activity without setting specific, measurable goals for each one, the group did set priorities among the activities and suggested a realistic frequency for each type of shared event. They also assigned a small, representative subgroup to begin planning for rotating fellowship events, as that was activity identified as the best place to begin.

The formal recommendation from the study group to the respective church councils also was organized according to the previously discussed actions and attitudes *away* from which Asbury needed to repent, and attitudes and actions *toward* which Asbury and Centennial needed to move. The intention to engage in a public act of repentance as well as the strategic partnership activities were included in the “attitudes and actions to adopt” section. Asbury’s Church Council received and considered this recommendation at its June 19, 2006 meeting. After long discussion the council chose to adopt the entire “attitudes and actions to adopt” section, including the partnership provisions, but chose not to adopt the “away from which to repent” section, perhaps partly out of fear doing so might incur undue legal or financial liability upon themselves.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless the strategic partnership concept, partly as a response to the cemetery situation was adopted officially. Centennial Church also adopted the portions of the recommendation that pertain specifically to them, as is indicated in their October 18, 2006 Charge Conference reports.<sup>6</sup>

As the first tangible expression of the strategic partnership, two fellowship events were held in 2006. The first was a “talent sharing” night on September 1 at Asbury. Partly in reflection upon this first fellowship event, a subsequent sermon preached at Asbury on September 17, 2006 is included in the Appendix.<sup>7</sup> The attempt in the sermon is to share with the congregation how the event for some was “a foretaste” or “sample” of the Revelation 5:9-reflective reality “toward which” the congregation is seeking to repent

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<sup>5</sup> See below, Appendices 5 and 6, for the recommendation and church council minutes for this meeting.

<sup>6</sup> See below, Appendix 7.

<sup>7</sup> See below, Appendix 8.

through the strategic partnership. One of the Centennial members, also a participant in the study group, described the evening this way.

“A Night of Sharing” (Sept. 1, 2006) has come to fruition. Several members of both churches participated in a talent show. Refreshments were served. This event was held at Asbury U.M. Church. Despite it being an extremely cold and rainy night, there was “good” participation and everyone who shared in the excitement was Blessed with being involved with one of the learning points from Steps toward Wholeness, that being Unity & Love.

Subsequently a “Gospel Fest” along with a potluck dinner was held at Centennial Church on December 1, 2006. During this event plans for a third event were being put into place.

It is well understood by the participants that these fellowship events are most likely the “safest” and least risky of the components of the partnership envisioned. And yet they are a start. Before moving on to a brief description of two pending matters relating to Asbury’s cemetery response and final recommendations, it is sufficient here to note that descriptive analysis of participants’ experiences clearly demonstrates that a theology of spiritual renewal through repentance and racial reconciliation is becoming tangible in Smyrna, Delaware. Through a simple shared study group and initial humble steps in a strategic partnership, ordinary yet often beautifully faithful Christians have begun to describe concomitant experiences of spiritual revival and racial reconciliation. Note also these are experiences they might not otherwise have had – at least not to this degree--except that an unsuspecting construction worker recently unearthed a grave, a seemingly silent reminder of a shared, sin-shrouded, and racially unjust past, yet also a pointer to something else. That anything good should arise therefrom might only be explained by a resurrecting God.

### **Pending Matters**

Two pending matters bear mentioning because each also will require sensitive application of this theology of spiritual renewal through repentance and racial reconciliation as Asbury Church and others move into the future. One matter involves continuing negotiations with the American Legion and the question of the extent of Asbury's responsibility to that organization in this matter. The other pending matter involves how this whole episode will be recorded historically by the State of Delaware.

#### **Negotiations with the American Legion Post**

The American Legion claims to have no knowledge or recollection that the site was ever used as a cemetery. Long-term Asbury members have difficulty believing no one in the organization knew at the time of sale that they were buying land hosting gravesites.

Whether Legion members were unaware of the plot's history as they say or cooperated knowingly with Asbury officials at the time of sale in acting as though the grave sites never existed, the deed of sale codicil points to some ethical, if not legal, responsibility Asbury continues to bear toward the Legion in reference to these gravesites. Once the site was officially declared a cemetery by the state, the Legion Post asked Asbury on August 31, 2006 to give them one acre of yet unused land from the Church's "Glenwood Cemetery" across Glenwood Avenue from the Legion's location. Asbury's Cemetery Team subsequently recommended that this request be denied and Asbury's Trustees concurred. At a follow-up meeting on November 15, 2006, American Legion representatives inquired of Asbury's willingness to sell one acre of land to them at a negotiated price. Asbury officials currently are considering this possibility.

As with commitments made at Asbury's initial Charge Conference after rediscovery of the gravesites, both times Asbury officials have met with American Legion officials to discuss property issues, the pastors of Bethel and Centennial churches have been informed and invited to participate. While Bethel AME Church seems to have lost interest in the cemetery matter, at both meetings with the American Legion, two Centennial members, who also happen to be Next-of-Kin to those buried at the site, and who both were participants in the *Steps Toward Wholeness* study, have attended. With the theological concern for social justice as part and parcel of racial reconciliation, it remains important for Asbury to follow through on its commitment in this way.

#### The Permanent Historical Record

The other pending matter, as mentions, involves the state of Delaware. The state's Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs has yet to finalize the official "Preservation Covenant for the Unmarked Asbury United Methodist Church African American Cemetery Site," and has delayed the public ceremony rededicating the area as an historic burial ground. Such preservation covenants include an opening "whereas" section establishing the rationale for binding the owner of the property to preserve it in the way specified in the body of the document. A meeting was held September 12, 2006, at the site including state officials, Next-of-Kin, and officials from Asbury Church, the American Legion Post, and the City of Smyrna, for the purpose of giving final approval to the treatment plan, preservation covenant and public ceremony plans. At this meeting one of the Next-of-Kin objected that the "whereas" section of the preservation covenant did not include an indictment of Asbury Church and local funeral directors for their role in allowing the site to become unmarked and unrecognizable as a cemetery, and for

selling it at profit without regard for its future upkeep as a burial ground. His rationale for this request was a concern for “truth telling” and he cited examples of recorded history in which injustices committed against African Americans or their positive exploits had been glossed over or not given their due.

While the state official objected to his proposed wording on factual grounds, other Next-of-Kin did not feel the need to be condemnatory toward Asbury Church and the funeral directors, and persons from Asbury felt irritated and hurt; the appropriate way for Asbury’s past role with this cemetery to be recorded historically is an issue not easily dismissed. On the one hand, as a Christian body given the grace to repent and receive forgiveness, they need not fear the past. God has separated their sins as far as the east is from the west. There is no need to “bury the past” or pretend it didn’t happen. Jesus already canceled its cursed power and buried the sins at His tomb. The church of the crucified and risen Jesus can admit the sin without excusing it and move on in the power of repentance and the new creation, corporately as well as individually. On the other hand, the holding onto of bitterness and retribution becomes a prison in and of itself. When persons and communities gloss over past sins and pretend they did not happen, the consequences tend to come back to haunt them and others. Surely that has happened in this case. Yet neither can past sins and condemnation alone be allowed to define anyone’s permanent future in community. That becomes a prison for all. Once again, Tutu’s perspective on restorative justice and the help only a resurrecting God offers seems incredibly relevant to everybody involved. How right are his words; “There is no future without forgiveness.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Image, Doubleday, 1999).

### **Final Recommendations**

Final recommendations for Asbury United Methodist Church and for Centennial United Methodist Church include merely two reiterations. One reiteration is the possible vision of eventually cooperating to plant a new, intentionally multiracial congregation. While attempting to merge the congregations at this point seems unwise, the opportunity in the future to share in the birth of a new congregation should be kept in view. It is a long-term vision, probably only possible after living out the partnership in all its possibilities, and learning more than anyone ever thought possible. The other reiteration is simply to keep in view the aforementioned need for unstinting intention, unstinting movement toward that Revelation 5:9-reflective vision. In their ongoing participation in the moving vortex toward personal and social holiness into which God is constantly, lovingly drawing them, nothing could be more important for both congregations than carrying through on the specific activities of the partnership. This will include practical matters such as assigning leadership from each church to plan and implement each activity. Especially important are the shared, multiracial small groups. The opportunity to study macro-issues of racial justice in a personal, supportive, face-to-face environment can be life changing. Could a movement of these groups not become little laboratories of personal holiness broadening out into social holiness, a Wesleyan starting point for unjamming the too-long-stalled process of dismantling remaining inequitable-racialization in our society? Yet most of all it will take unstinting intention. Yet to know a reviving, resurrecting God who provides spiritual renewal through repentance and racial reconciliation is to know there is no turning back from this pursuit.

## Conclusion

Is it possible? Is it possible in response to merely embarrassing or potentially socially devastating revelations, practically in one's own backyard, about one's own spiritual forbears' past injustice and racial insensitivity, to find grace? Is it possible, in response to the discovery of "buried secrets," to make tangible a biblically-supported, historically-sensitive theology of revival through repentance and racial reconciliation?

Believing it is this writer has endeavored to illustrate it in the lives of a group of ordinary Christians he has come to love dearly. For them this is not just theory. This is their life. They have demonstrated it is possible, if only in a preliminary but authentic way, with much potential for the future.

For all Christians everywhere who ache with me and long in their hearts for that time and place where we have no shame nor superiority vis-à-vis one another, only the all-satisfying, everlasting, experience of many-colored worship befitting a lamb on a throne -- it is possible. As Martin Luther King, Jr., paraphrasing one and quoting another, often said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice," and "Truth crushed to the ground will rise again."<sup>9</sup> It is, it does, and it will. Even in Smyrna, Delaware.

But so are, so do, and so shall people. In Jesus only the sins stay buried. And that finally is why the grave rediscovered on June 20, 2005, at North and Delaware Streets, Smyrna, brings ultimate hope. We need not gloss over, make secret, excuse, or hide from the past; just as we cannot, must not gloss over, or pretend any of God's children did not

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<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Martin Luther King, Jr., "Where Do We Go From Here?" an address made to the Tenth Anniversary Convention of the S.C.L.C. in Atlanta, August 16, 1967, recorded in Philip S. Foner, *The Voice of Black America* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1972), in which King paraphrases a longer quote by 19<sup>th</sup> century abolitionist Theodore Parker, and quotes a line from "The Battle Field" by U.S. Poet William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878), [cited 10 Jan. 2007]. Online: [www.indiana.edu/~iviewweb/mlkwhere.html](http://www.indiana.edu/~iviewweb/mlkwhere.html).



or do not exist. Try as much as racial injustice may to deny it, they are never invisible from above. This grave of a human being, of a woman and of a people worthily created in all the dignity of the divine image, points to another reality, another story. It arises from incredibly deep within the heart of the Trinity. “Father, forgive them,” Jesus said from the cross, and the God who loves to forgive and revive to the point of resurrection acted, as this God is acting still. And out of the grave comes the firstborn from the dead, and with him one new humanity. Why, he did it just the other week over on East Mount Vernon at a church supper. We saw it. We experienced it.

Thus, those who believe in the Lamb who was slain, the Lamb of sacrificial love and resurrection power, know that the graves are never silent. Is it possible? Can these bones live? Are many of those whose bodies are buried there at North and Delaware Streets, not now part of that heavenly, out-of-time throng? The sins may be buried, but the dignity and praise of God’s many-varied, redeemed children will never be silenced. Somehow, some way, some day, the bones are going to make some noise. He is not here, he has risen; she is not here, they have risen! They have and will rise with the lamb and sing around the throne forever. And so, by grace through faith, may we!

O blest communion, fellowship divine!  
 We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;  
 Yet all are one in thee, for all are thine.  
 Alleluia, Alleluia!<sup>10</sup>

Just so, the graves are not silent.

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<sup>10</sup> William W. How, “For All the Saints,” (1864) in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 711.

## APPENDIX 1

### A TIMELINE FROM GRAVESITE REDISCOVERY TO PRESENT

20 June 2005	Gravesites rediscovered during construction of parking lot on American Legion property formerly owned by Asbury United Methodist Church.  Delaware Division of Cultural and Historical Affairs investigation begins.
29 June 2005	First <i>News Journal</i> article published.
17 July 2005	Second <i>News Journal</i> article published.
19 July 2005	Documents relating to 1976 sale, including codicil regarding gravesites, discovered and examined by Asbury's pastor, contents shared with Asbury leaders. <sup>1</sup>  Documents relating to sale shared with pastors of Bethel AME and Centennial United Methodist churches.
03 August 2005	Asbury Charge Conference conducted, guiding resolution passed. <sup>2</sup>  State investigation continues including search for Next-of-Kin.
April-June 2006	Pastors and members of Centennial and Asbury congregations undertake <i>Steps Toward Wholeness</i> study.
10 May 2006	Public Notice for Next-of-Kin published by City of Smyrna in <i>Smyrna-Clayton Sun-Times</i> .  State investigation continues.

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<sup>1</sup> See below, Appendix 2.

<sup>2</sup> See below, Appendix 3.

- 19 June 2006 Asbury Church Council considers recommendation from *Steps Toward Wholeness* study group, approves “Present Attitudes/Actions We Need to Adopt” section including a “Public Act of Repentance/Apology” and intention to enter into an ongoing “Strategic Partnership” with Centennial Church. Church Council chooses not to act on “Past Attitudes/Actions from which Asbury Needs to Repent” section and requests Trustees to obtain legal advice.<sup>3</sup>
- 27 June 2006 Attorney investigates, advises Asbury’s probable liability limited to actual relocation of any gravesites.
- 12 August 2006 State Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs completes investigation and presents proposed “Treatment and Disposition Plan” and “Preservation Covenant” to Next-of-Kin and American Legion officials in meeting at burial site. American Legion officials invite representatives from Asbury to the meeting and Asbury’s pastor offers impromptu, informal apology to Next-of-Kin for Asbury’s role in the failure to maintain and recognize the site as a cemetery.
- 31 August 2006 Asbury officials meet with American Legion officials regarding property issues. American Legion requests land swap in which Asbury would retake ownership of the cemetery and give the American Legion one acre of currently unused Glenwood Cemetery property on the north side of Glenwood Avenue adjacent to present American Legion property on the south side of Glenwood Avenue. As per Asbury’s August 3, 2005 Charge Conference commitment, Centennial congregational representatives are apprised of this meeting. Two members who are also Next of Kin, and who were *Steps Toward Wholeness* participants observe this meeting.
- 01 September 2006 First social event of the Partnership, a “Talent Night” between Centennial and Asbury churches held at Asbury.
- 12 September 2006 State Division follow-up meeting with American Legion, Next-of-Kin, Asbury and Centennial church representatives. One member of the Next-of-Kin objects to wording of Preservation Covenant’s Preamble. Wants recognition of racial injustice perpetrated by Asbury Church and local funeral directors to be part of the permanent historical record for this parcel of land.
- 17 September 2006 “Fruit Salad” sermon preached at Asbury Church.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See below, Appendices 5 and 6.

<sup>4</sup> See below, Appendix 8.

- September 2006 Asbury Cemetery Team recommends against giving one acre of land to the American Legion. Trustees concur and this is reported to the Church Council. Trustees also agree for Asbury to bear cost for reburial of the one disturbed gravesite to its previous location. Member of Trustees volunteers to cover this cost.
- 18 October 2006 Centennial United Methodist Church annual Charge Conference held. Conference receives reports from *Steps Toward Wholeness* study participants.<sup>5</sup>
- 15 November 2006 Follow-up meeting between American Legion and Asbury representatives held. Two Centennial members also present. American Legion requests availability of one acre Glenwood Avenue site for purchase. Asbury agrees to investigate possibility of a sale.
- 01 December 2006 Strategic Partnership's second social event is held, a pot luck dinner with hymn sing at Centennial Church.
- 01 January 2007 State Division's finalization of wording for Preservation Covenant still pending. Asbury and American Legion negotiations regarding land sale still pending. Date for formal rededication of cemetery and Asbury's formal act of repentance still pending.

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<sup>5</sup> See below, Appendix 7.

## APPENDIX 2

### WORDING OF CODICIL ATTACHED TO ASBURY'S 1976 DEED OF SALE TO THE AMERICAN LEGION [ON ASBURY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH LETTERHEAD]

To the best of my knowledge proper removal of grave site monuments has fulfilled the requirements of the Division of Public Health of the State of Delaware as authorized in writing to Asbury United Methodist Church September 14, 1976 and further, to the best of my knowledge there is no indication of the need for the removal of any grave site, as no particular grave site can be identified. Also no records of the Cemetery or possible descendants or heirs are available to us. Mr. [\*\*\*\*\*] and Mr. [\*\*\*\*\*] have stated that to the best of their knowledge no burials have taken place on said plot in their respective times.

In the event during any construction on this site a grave should be discovered it will be the responsibility of Asbury United Methodist Church to see that proper relocation of grave is accomplished.

[Document signed by President and Secretary of Asbury's Board of Trustees  
and two local funeral directors.]

### APPENDIX 3

#### RESOLUTION UNANIMOUSLY PASSED AT SPECIAL CHARGE CONFERENCE OF ASBURY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, AUGUST 5, 2005

WHEREAS, in 1976 Asbury United Methodist Church, Smyrna, Delaware, sold property at the northwest corner of Delaware and North Streets to David C. Harrison Post No. 14, American Legion, Inc., and

WHEREAS, at the time of sale duly elected officials of Asbury United Methodist Church acknowledged in writing the Church's responsibility for proper grave site relocation in the event an actual grave should be discovered during any future construction on the property, and

WHEREAS, in 2005 an actual grave has been discovered and several possible grave sites identified during construction of a parking lot on said property, and

WHEREAS, Asbury United Methodist Church, Centennial United Methodist Church, and Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church all have a shared history relating to the property in question, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED THAT Asbury United Methodist Church appoint a team of persons including the Senior Pastor and the chairpersons of the Board of Trustees and the Cemetery Team, to represent the church's responsibilities and interests in formal discussions with the American Legion and any other parties with a legitimate interest in the matter, including the appropriate city and state authorities. This team shall offer Asbury's cooperation in seeking any long-term plan that treats the gravesites with proper dignity and considers the needs and interests of all parties involved. After consulting with said parties, the team shall report its recommendation to a subsequent Charge Conference before the Church commits any financial resources or takes final action in the matter.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT Asbury United Methodist Church officially invite and encourage officials from Centennial United Methodist Church and Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church to participate in all formal discussions Asbury holds with the American Legion and other interested parties in this regard.

## APPENDIX 4

### “LEARNINGS AND HOPES” RECORDED BY *STEPS TOWARD WHOLENESS* STUDY PARTICIPANTS, MAY 25, 2006

#### **Steps toward Wholeness: Learning and Repentance**

#### ***Learnings and Hopes*** (recorded 25 May 2006)

- Forgiveness: With forgiveness we have a future of togetherness.
- Children’s children: I hope they have a new perspective on race, God.
- Differences don’t have to make a difference.
- I hope to gain a culture to share.
- Hope regarding racism: Let it go and let God in.
- A person(’s value) is not defined by melanin.
- Openness: We need more of it.
- I hope we can ‘go beyond’ these sessions.
- I hope what has started here may have an impact on our congregations and community.
- I hope this is contagious.
- I hope to see us coming and going together on Mt. Vernon (originally ‘Methodist’) Street.
- Hope: Not just talk – Action!
- Hope: mutually valued, race-inclusive, Christ-tangible community in Smyrna.
- Love and Unity.

## APPENDIX 5

### RECOMMENDATIONS FROM *STEPS TOWARD WHOLENESS* STUDY GROUP TO ASBURY AND CENTENNIAL CHURCH COUNCILS

#### **Past Attitudes/Actions from which Asbury Needs to Repent**

##### ATTITUDES:

- 'Black' gravesites less worthy of recognition and upkeep than 'White' gravesites.

##### ACTIONS:

- Removal (and disposal?) of remaining grave markers (1930's—1970?) and sale of property (1976) to American Legion without consulting African-American community (Bethel AME, Centennial UM congregations).

#### **Present Attitudes/Actions we Need to Adopt**

##### ATTITUDES:

- All gravesites (especially those on present or former church property) worthy of recognition and upkeep without regard to race (Galatians 3:28).

##### ACTIONS:

- In any official property consultation involving Asbury with American Legion and/or government authorities regarding this property, Asbury will invite representatives from Bethel AME and Centennial UM congregations to participate (passed at Asbury Charge Conference Aug 05).
- Public Act of Repentance/Apology to entire community at time of cemetery 'Re-Recognition'
- Centennial UMC and Asbury UMC form Strategic Partnership to include specific goals regarding the following activities:
  - small group studies
  - 'worshiper-exchange' program
  - Social activities with intentional mingling (films, concerts, dinners, etc.)
  - Shared mission project (Habitat for Humanity House)
  - Pulpit exchanges



## APPENDIX 6

### A PORTION OF THE MINUTES OF THE CHURCH COUNCIL MEETING OF ASBURY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, JUNE 19, 2006 RELATING TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE *STEPS TOWARD WHOLENESS* STUDY GROUP

The council read and considered recommendations from the Reconciliation Study Group on race relations. The group consists of six members from Centennial United Methodist Church and six members from Asbury United Methodist Church. After considerable discussion, [\*\*\*\*\*] moved and [\*\*\*\*\*] seconded that the Church Council affirm the study group's "Present Attitudes/Actions We Need to Adopt," which include:

ATTITUDES: All gravesites (especially those on present or former church property) worthy of recognition and upkeep without regard to race (Galatians 3:28).

ACTIONS: In any official property consultation involving Asbury with American Legion and/or government authorities regarding this property, Asbury will invite representatives from Bethel AME and Centennial UM congregations to participate (passed at Asbury Charge Conference Aug. 05).

Public Act of Repentance/Apology to entire community at time of cemetery "Re-Re-recognition."

Centennial UMC and Asbury UMC form Strategic Partnership to include specific goals regarding the following activities:

- small group studies
- worshipper-exchange program
- social activities with intentional mingling (films, concerts, dinners, etc.)
- shared mission project (Habitat for Humanity house)
- pulpit exchanges

The motion was passed.

[\*\*\*\*\*] made a motion to request the Board of Trustees to engage legal representation with all deliberate speed in regards to the sale of property to the American Legion. [\*\*\*\*\*] seconded the motion. After considerable discussion, the motion passed 6-3 with 3 members abstaining from voting.

## APPENDIX 7

### REPORTS TO THE CHARGE CONFERENCE OF CENTENNIAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, OCTOBER 18, 2006, INDICATING ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CENTENNIAL-ASBURY STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

#### Centennial / Asbury “Steps Toward Wholeness Initiative”

A study group was formed to propose recommendations to Asbury and Centennial United Methodist Church Councils. Six members from Centennial and Asbury met once a week for six weeks to discuss past attitudes/actions from which Asbury needs to repent about the selling of black gravesites. We discussed attitudes from both churches about the selling of black gravesites less worthy of recognition and upkeep than the white gravesites.

We discussed actions about removal (and disposal) of remaining grave markers (1830-1970?) and sale of property (1976) to American Legion without consulting African-American Community (Bethel AME, Centennial UM congregations).

#### Present attitudes/actions we need to adopt

##### Attitudes

All gravesites (especially those on present or former church property) are worthy of recognition and upkeep without regard to race.

##### Actions

In any official property consultation involving Asbury with the American Legion and/or Government Authorities regarding this property, Asbury will invite representatives from Bethel AME and Centennial UM Congregations to participate (passed at Asbury Charge Conference – Aug. 05).

- Public Act of Repentance/Apology to entire Community at time of Cemetery Recognition.
- Centennial UMC and Asbury UMC form a strategic partnership to include specific goals regarding the following activities:
  - Small group studies

- Worshiper – exchange program
- Social Activities with intentional mingling (concerts, dinners, films, etc.)
- Shared mission project (Habitat for Humanity House)
- Pulpit exchanges

This committee has since worked on two projects, one of which has come to fruition, a night of sharing (September 1, 2006). Several members of both church participated in a talent show. Refreshments were served. This event was held at Asbury Church. Despite it being an extremely cold and rainy night, there was “good” participation and everyone who shared in the excitement was Blessed with being involved with one of the learning points from *Steps Toward Wholeness*, that being Unity and Love.

The next event is set for December 1, 2006 and will be held at Centennial Church which will be a pot-luck dinner and hymn sing. It is felt that there will be much participation from both churches.

Centennial/Asbury  
“Steps Toward Wholeness Initiative”

*In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. –Galatians 3:36  
Join hands, disciples of the faith, whate’er your race may be.  
All children of the living God are surely kin to me.*

In April of 2006 several members of Centennial U.M. Church along with members of Asbury U.M. Church, Smyrna met to work on “Steps Toward Wholeness.” From that group came about a group of four, two from Asbury, along with two from Centennial. This committee of four has since worked on two projects, one of which has come to fruition, “A Night of Sharing” (Sept. 1, 2006). Several members of both churches participated in a talent show. Refreshments were served. This event was held at Asbury U.M. Church. Despite it being an extremely cold and rainy night, there was “good” participation and everyone who shared in the excitement was Blessed with being involved with one of the learning points from “Steps Toward Wholeness,” that being Unity & Love.

The next event is set for December 1, 2006 and will be held at Centennial U.M. Church. It will be touted as “A Gospel Fest” along with a pot-luck dinner. The plans for this event are now being finalized. It is felt that there will be much participation from both churches and will help with another point in our “Steps toward Wholeness” – “Differences Don’t Have to Make a Difference.”

## APPENDIX 8

### “FRUIT SALAD”

A SERMON PREACHED AT ASBURY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
SEPTEMBER 17, 2006

If you woke up one morning and all of a sudden got a hankering for fruit, which would you prefer: a bowl of just one kind of fruit, a fruit salad, or a fruit smoothie?

Another question: When it comes to your relationship with other Christians, and Asbury’s relationship with other churches, what kind of spiritual fruit should we offer to the community at large and to God: separate bowls of fruit, a fruit salad, or a fruit smoothie?

One way to answer that question is to begin with the end in mind. In Revelation 5 ultimate worship is described in heaven. It’s where we are all headed in Christ. It says there are people of every tongue and tribe and nation gathered together around the throne, worshipping together. Notice, the diversity of ethnicity and culture is intentional. People don’t lose their ethnic and cultural identity in heaven. They lose their sin. The spiritual fruit of worship God prefers is not necessarily a fruit smoothie where everybody is the same. BUT, they are worshipping together, cooperatively. Ethnically, culturally, the

spiritual fruit of worship God prefers to consume is not separated, segregated bowls of fruit where people don't even know each other, neither is it a fruit smoothie where everybody is forced into a bland sameness. May I be so bold as to suggest that God is partial to fruit salad.

In our relationship with other Christians, in our relationship with other congregations, how do we become that now? Each week we pray together these words, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." How do we start now to become more like we will be in heaven -- particularly in how we relate to other Christians and other congregations?

You see, that's what this book of Galatians is all about. Paul says, "in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." What does that mean? What it means for us is this: there are two no's that emerge from this passage that we need to keep in mind in all our relationships, particularly in our relationships with one another and with other congregations. Then I want to close by sharing a practical opportunity for us here at Asbury.

Two no's: first, no pecking order. In other words, no second class citizens. There is no ethnic, linguistic, cultural, gender pecking order in heaven. We are all different, distinct and equally valuable in Christ. I learned from one of you a couple of weeks ago that chickens in a chicken house literally will peck the feathers off of each others back in

order to stake out whose status is higher than whose. Know what, humans do the same thing; we're just a little more subtle about it; we use money and power and words and looks. We've all had that feeling.

They did it in the first century in Galatia. They had already established a pecking order based on who one's parents were. Everybody could be believers but if your parents were direct descendents of Abraham, you were given a slightly higher status than if your parents were Gentiles. One of the ways they marked that off was that when Peter came to visit he wasn't willing to eat with the Gentile believers. They were willing to eat with him; he was unwilling to eat with them. It was a status thing. Paul called him on the carpet for that. He basically told him, "Look, in Jesus we have a new social reality here, but you are still trying to say, 'I'm better than you Gentiles.'" In Christ there is no pecking order based on things we cannot change."

I read a novel a few years ago about pecking order in a particular segment of society on Long Island and the subtle but careful layers of status associated with various things such as new money and old money and family and associations and so forth. The rule was, if you were interacting with someone of a lower status, it was classy to be kind and polite, but if they got the wrong idea and deigned to begin to act as if they were your social equal, then you had permission to insult them mercilessly. In other words, as long as they stayed in their place on the pecking order, no problem. You know what, folks, there is none of that shenanigans or foolishness or nonsense in heaven. There is no pecking order in heaven and it does not belong among the fellowship of all those washed in the baptismal waters of Jesus Christ. Our value and identity is not based on how we

compare with each other. Our value and identity in heaven and here is based on how we respond to the Christ.

So here's what I want you to do. Next time you are in a social situation where you see this silly human pecking order thing happening, where you feel tempted to peck somebody else's feathers off, or you sense someone going after yours, you enjoy that party and those people in a new way. Say to yourself "no pecking order in heaven, no pecking order in heaven, thank God Almighty there is no pecking order in heaven," and chuckle inside to yourself.

In heaven there is no pecking order based on things we cannot change. It has no place in the church or in our relationships with other congregations. If that's true than another "no" also follows. If in Christ there is no pecking order, then in Christ there is never any shame or hatred over things we cannot change. No pecking order, no shame, no hatred.

Now, don't get me wrong, there is a place for shame and guilt in the Christian life. In Christ, shame or guilt can be useful in helping us change the things we can change, but it's only meant to be temporary. What I'm talking about is -- there is no place in heaven or in our relationship with other believers here and now for any shame or hatred over things we cannot change.

It's like I know the twelve step movement and recovery groups and the serenity prayer came after; but it's almost like Paul is trying to tell the Galatians and now us this thing: pray the serenity prayer for each other, no shame over what you cannot change, only courage and grace to change what you can – together in Christ.

Several years ago I was talking to my doctor about my blood pressure. It's little high, not too, too high, but high enough to treat. He was explaining to me the factors involved in this. One is heredity of course, and he said to me, "You can't choose your parents." Okay, but there are all these other factors, diet and stress and exercise and so forth, which you have some control over. So from that time on I just told myself I'm going to eat healthy, work hard but not too hard, exercise and those kinds of things. I haven't been perfect on those things, but pretty good. With God's help I will change what I can change, but I will never feel any shame or hatred over who my parents are and the genes they gave me.

In Christ there is no pecking order and no shame or hatred over that which we cannot change. A wonderful opportunity we have here at Asbury to apply those heavenly no's in our relationships with other Christians is through a strategic partnership with Centennial United Methodist Church. For those who may not know Centennial is a predominately (though not exclusively) African American UM congregation that worships just three blocks east of us on E Mt Vernon St. Our congregations have a shared history that dates back to the 1800's.

Our Church Councils are working on specific plans over the next few years for five kinds of shared experiences including worship services, pulpit exchanges, Bible studies, mission projects, and fellowship events.

It just makes sense on so many levels. It makes sense historically. It makes sense practically, our churches don't just share the same grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we share it in the same denomination on the same street. It makes sense relationally because



of the good relationships and experiences people have had already over many years. And it makes sense strategically in reaching out in mission to this community, and up to God in worship. At a shared Bible study with Asbury and Centennial members this past spring I asked them the same question I began this message with: “In our relationship together, what kind of spiritual fruit should Asbury and Centennial offer to the community at large: separate bowls of fruit on the same salad bar, fruit salad, or marmalade?” Well, nobody liked marmalade much, but one guy said, “Reverend, right now it seems like sometimes what we have now are different bowls of fruit in different restaurants. If we could just get them on the same serving line that would be great.” After we put the five shared activities on the board, another person remarked, “If we did all those things, who knows what could happen?” Who knows?

This past September 1 we did a fellowship event with Centennial and it was a holiday weekend with lousy weather but we had a nice turnout. We had fellowship around tables and talents were shared, and I saw people just being who they were together – relating to one another with no pecking order, no shame or hatred over things we cannot change. Now we had some snacks and deserts and Reverend White teased me about how much was on my plate and I didn’t do much good for my blood pressure but I enjoyed it all. And when it was all said and done and all the singing and prayer and poetry and dancing and music were lifted heavenward – I might have had snacks and desert, but may I be so bold as to suggest, God – got fruit salad.

Lets’ make more, folks. With Centennial and in all our relationships, armed with those heavenly NO’s , lets make more fruit salad for God.

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